**BLUEBIRD RESTORATION ASSOCIATION OF WISCONSIN**

**32ND ANNUAL MEETING**

**APRIL 7, 2018**

**BEAVER CREEK RESERVE**

**FALL CREEK, WISCONSIN**

The 32nd annual meeting of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin was held at the Beaver Creek Reserve in Fall Creek on April 7, 2018. A total of 66 bluebird fans and various wildlife specialists were in attendance on a cold spring day.

President Pat Ready welcomed participants and opened the convention at 9:30 AM. Pat remarked that Snow Buntings and Horned Larks are still being seen and polled members to see where Eastern Bluebirds were being seen in the state. The northern third of the state did not have Bluebirds yet but they had returned to the southern two thirds. Next year’s convention should be somewhere in the southwest corner of the state where the early spring weather should be better. Pat also thanked Rita Gundry and others who supplied us with coffee, cookies and rolls this morning. He reminded members that we are able to keep the convention costs low because it is subsidized by the silent auction. He encouraged members to bid on items and reminded them that we will close the auction at 1:00 PM. Pat also encouraged members let him know if they had any suggestions for future conventions.

Pat then introduced Dan Schroeder, BRAW Treasurer who gave us the Treasurers report. Dan presented a chart with a 10 year history, from 2007-2017, of our revenue vs. expenses. Our expenses had begun exceeding our revenue in 2013, but that trend began to improve in 2017 as our revenue was $113 more than expenses. In the first quarter of this year our revenue has exceeded expenses by $1242.

Pat Ready then proceeded to the eighth annual awards presentation. The Bluebirder of the Year Award was presented to Barb Allen from Green Bay. Barb has set up new trails and refurbished older trails in four counties. She covers four golf courses and monitors an amazing 231 nest boxes in total.

Leif Marking, who was not able to attend, was presented with a Director Emeritus Award. Leif was on the board for many years and was in charge of our nest box designs. He did many studies that enhanced our knowledge of the Eastern Bluebird and produced DVD’s that promoted them.

The Merit Award was given to Bill & Donna Stehling, County Coordinators for Sauk County. They monitor 67 nest boxes at Badger Lands plus other locations as well. Donna spoke of her enjoyment of teaching and the pleasure she gets showing students their Bluebird trail.

The Educator of the Year was awarded to Memuna Khan. Memuna started a 25 box Bluebird trail in 2006 with the assistance of Kent Hall. Her students monitor, take growth data and band all of the birds. Her students also do data analysis on climate, winter severity, nest box occupancy and first egg laid.

The Lifetime Achievement Award went to JP Lafouge, who was not able to attend. JP has been our web designer but he and his wife Ellen have retired and will be moving to France.

Pat Ready then introduced the board members in attendance – Claire Romanak, Brad Zinda, Dan Schroeder, Fred Craig, Mike Helgren and Steve Sample. He noted that board members Steve Fallon and Dave Lucey were not able to attend.

Steve Sample gave the next presentation, the 2017 Data Summary compiled by Steve Fallon. The total fledged in 2017 was 23,266 and we were again the leading state for Bluebird production. Steve showed us several charts, one comparing 2016 vs 2017 statistics, one with 2017 total fledged by county and trends from 1994-2017. Climate continues to be the biggest factor in nesting success.

Pat Ready then introduced our first speaker, Steve Betchkal, with a Birding by Ear program. Steve is an ornithologist who has written 5 books, received 21 emmys for news and an Edward R. Murrow award. Steve gave a lively and fun program on why birds sing, how their anatomy differs from ours and how to use mnemonics to master their calls. He taught us the calls of the Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl and Saw whet Owl to much amusement. Steve also gave us info on websites to download calls. He also spoke some on conservation issues that particularly effect birds such as climate change, lights out at night, guy wires on towers, cats outdoors and urban sprawl. Steve had his latest book, Make Birds Not War, for sale for $10 and was signing copies for purchasers.

We adjourned at noon for a lunch of either turkey or ham sandwiches, pasta salad, chips and a brownie. The silent auction was closed promptly at 1:00 PM and the winning bidders were able to claim their items and pay Dan Schroeder for them.

President Pat Ready then introduced the next program, Wisconsin Wolves. Ray Leonard was unable to make it so Scott Theil filled in for him. Scott works with the Timber Wolf Information Network which was started in the 1980’s. They run workshops at Beaver Creek Reserve, Sandhill and Treehaven in Wisconsin. We learned about the origins, physiology, life in a pack and life within a wolf population. We saw the difference between a cougar skull and a wolf skull, the historical and present day prey of wolves and how to identify a wolf vs coyote track. We also learned how wolves communicate, raise their young and defend their territories. Scott answered questions on how the wolf count is done, how wolves interact with bears and how wolves made their way into Wisconsin. We also learned about the threats to wolves, that most pups do not survive and that they are susceptible to parvovirus, distemper and starvation. In the 1960’s the only wolves left in the lower 50 states were in the arrowhead of Minnesota, now there are about 925 in the state. In a study that was done both in Wisconsin and Minnesota on fawn predation it was discovered that the #1 predator was Bobcat, followed closely by Black Bear. Scott gave us a lot of good information and it was very interesting.

At 2:30, following the Wisconsin Wolves presentation, Pat Ready announced a return to the “Ask the Bluebird Experts” panel discussion. The participants were Pat Ready, Fred Craig, Gordon Webber and Gene Birr. The session opened with a discussion on Wren problems and the habitats that favor them. Then there was a question on what the current recommendations were for placing nest boxes, 100 yds apart or some sort of pairing. Pat Ready stated that Wisconsin stands alone in not pairing boxes. Joe O’Halloran’s study proved that pairing does not help much for Bluebirds. If it works for you OK, but BRAW does not promote it. Minnesota has more monitors but less Bluebirds, pairing really helps Tree Swallows. Another question was on the mortality rate on the first nesting last year, many dead in boxes, some fully feathered. It was very cold last spring, there was not enough food. Female does not brood after they are 6 days old, some suggestions were to use handwarmers under the nest, make sure the nest is not wet & replace if necessary. Fred Craig supports using a mesh screen that is ¼” off of the floor under the nest to help keep it dry. In the case of fully feathered nestlings, they probably starved because the parents could not find food. Pat Ready stated that he lost 45 eggs and chicks, there were large Tree Swallow losses as well. Gene brought an interesting box that he will try out, it’s supposedly will deter House Sparrows. The house has a 3” hole cut into the roof that is covered with plexiglass. The House Sparrow likes a dark interior and it is felt that the sun shining into the box might keep them out. Fred Craig questioned whether this design would make the box interior too hot, Leif documented that the young will die if the box interior gets to 105 degrees. A question was asked about a nest box that has two entrance holes, one in front and one on the side. Supposedly the House Sparrow is not attracted to that either. Pat Ready asked if anyone had success using a K box which is also supposed to deter House Sparrows. There is an issue that the Van Ert trap won’t work on that box. Gene spoke about the Noel wire cages on nest boxes for raccoons, cats and snakes. He states that he has them on 75% of his boxes and has suffered no losses in 3 years. Pat Ready spoke of Leif’s video of a raccoon climbing up a pvc guard at night and eating eggs. Fred states he has had good luck with pvc but he keeps it waxed. Lowell Peterson is having a problem with Tree Swallows taking over his boxes at Willow River State Park, but one box with an overhanging pine branch is not used by Tree Swallows. Members have used stovepipes, greased poles, slinkys and barbed wire to keep raccoons away with varying success. There was a question of what could be done about bears tearing up boxes. One member is trying peppermint extract on a cotton ball under the house to see if it works. Steve Sample wonders if the garlic that is used on cattle to keep ticks away might work as a deterrent.

President Pat Ready adjourned the meeting at 3:04 PM