

**BLUEBIRD RESTORATION ASSOCIATION OF WISCONSIN**  
**33rd ANNUAL MEETING**  
**SEPTEMBER 14, 2019**  
**KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE**  
**LA FARGE, WISCONSIN**

The 33rd annual meeting of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin was held at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve in La Farge on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. A total of 49 bluebird fans and various wildlife specialists were in attendance on a beautiful late summer day.

President Pat Ready welcomed participants and opened the convention at 9:01 AM. Pat remarked that there were reports that the black flies were bad and that some use dryer sheets to repel them. There are also reports that insect populations are dropping and the effect this may be having on Bluebird populations is hard to define. Pat advised that monitors should use the Noel coon guards if they have missing eggs or young and to try using mealworms as a supplement if insects are not abundant. Pat also remarked that BRAW is having trouble recruiting members, especially younger people as they see Bluebirds all the time and do not see the need. However, if nest boxes are not monitored and maintained they will be overrun by mice, wrens and house sparrows. Pat is also looking to recruit more board members as he only plans to serve one more term and Claire Romanak's term is ending this year.

Pat then introduced Dan Schroeder, BRAW Treasurer who gave us the Treasurers report. Dan presented a chart with a 13 year history, from 2007-2019, of our revenue vs. expenses. Our expenses are pretty steady but our revenue is gradually declining. The projections show us operating at a loss, primarily due to declining membership. Revenue sources have remained steady for other categories but memberships have declined from 70-75% of revenue down to the current 45%.

Pat Ready then proceeded to the ninth annual awards presentation. He thanked Rita Gundry who supplied the treats and coffee for the convention and everyone who donated to the silent auction.

Carol McDaniel, who was not able to attend, was presented with an Emeritus Award. Her daughter Christine accepted the award for her. Pat Ready read an email from Carol and mentioned that she was the one who signed him up as a member back in 2002. Carol is a past BRAW president, active in the Lafayette County Bluebird Society and the current County Coordinator Chairperson.

There were two Merit Awards given, one to Claire Romanak who has been a board member since 2008, is the current board Secretary and monitors a bluebird trail in her area. The other award went to Rick Fare, who could not be present but it will be mailed to him. Rick is very

active in the Hoy Audubon Club in Racine, organizing bluebird trails, supplying nest boxes and collecting data.

The Joe O'Halloran Award went to Mike Helgren, a past board member and Treasurer. Mike began putting up nest boxes in the 1980's in Monroe County, is a long time BRAW member and has also been essential to BRAW's Garden Expo participation.

The County Coordinator of the Year Award went to Pat Ready and was given by Steve Sample, BRAW Vice President. When Carol McDaniel, County Coordinator Chair, was asked who she would recommend for this award, she stated that she could not think of a better person than Pat. He recruits members, does workshops, gives talks at Wild Birds Unlimited, Schlitz Audubon & Garden Expo, leads field trips and monitors several trails. He has been on the board since 2006 and a County Coordinator since 2007 as well as the Wisconsin Bluebird editor.

Steve Fallon gave the next presentation, the 2018 vs 2017 Data Summary. The bluebird numbers were all down with Tree Swallows and Wrens remaining steady. Eastern Bluebirds occupied less boxes, fledged less chicks and less chicks per box than in 2017. This decline was seen statewide. The 2019 data is not published yet but some of the comments he is seeing are about the cold & wet spring along with late snowstorms, heavy Tree Swallow competition and problems with Wrens, black flies and ants. In some areas the Bluebirds did not start nesting until May and only had one brood. This is the third year in a row that we have had a late spring. Pat Ready recommended opening the nest box after the first brood has fledged and closing it after a week to deter Tree Swallows from taking over the box. He is getting an 80% re-nesting of Bluebirds by using this method. Pat also recommends not feeding House Sparrows by tying a piece of monofilament fishing line to the feeders which works well to deter them.

Pat Ready then introduced our first speaker, Scott Walker with his Grouse in the Mist program. Scott is currently a Large Carnivore Specialist with the DNR but has worked with grouse while teaching at the university in the past. Grouse used to be common in the driftless area 30-40 years ago but the population has steadily declined. Grouse are a young forest obligate species, they need dense young forests to survive. As forests mature they change to high trees which shade the understory and results in an open, park like forest. The woods needs disturbance to open it to light, either by storms, fire or harvests to create a balance between old and new growth. In the past the small family farms used the woods for firewood and to graze their cattle which created openings but land use has now changed. The best Ruffed Grouse population in the driftless area was in the 1980's but as the forests have matured their numbers have fallen off. From Northeast Iowa all the way to the Atlantic the oak forests are declining as they transition to a maple/basswood woods. Oaks require effort to support them and there are very little young oaks, most are 50-85 years old. Scott advocates for timber harvesting as a way of creating the disturbance necessary to regenerate these woods and create the brushy young forest openings that grouse and other species require. The deer herd

also needs to be controlled to allow the brush and small trees to grow. Recommended shrubs to plant for grouse include sumac, prickly ash and hazelnuts. It would also be helpful to reduce the grouse season length and bag limits in Southern WI, but there is resistance to that approach. The grouse population in the northern part of the state is stable.

Pat Ready then introduced the next speaker from the Wisconsin Chimney Swift Working Group, Sandy Schwab. Sandy is not only involved with Chimney Swifts but monitors a Bluebird trail at a golf course as well. Chimney Swifts are huge insectivores who depend on human structures for nesting and roosting. They are nicknamed “flying cigars” because of their shape, they do not perch and fly most of the day, even bathing while in flight. Chimney Swifts are cavity nesters and while they will nest in hollow trees, most nest in chimneys. One pair will occupy a chimney, building a twig nest that they cement together with their saliva. The average nest will contain 265 twigs which they collect by snapping them off with their feet while in flight. They typically lay 2-6 eggs. They also use chimneys for roosting during migration, where many can be seen entering a chimney at dusk. Their breeding range is east of the Rocky Mtns. and into Canada and the Breeding Bird Surveys have swifts declining 20-29% globally. Chimney Swifts in the Midwest are declining due to fewer uncapped chimneys, loss of insect populations, loss of natural roosts, intense storms during migration, habitat destruction in the US and South America, window strikes and predators. Wisconsin Chimney Swift Working Group’s mission is to keep Swifts in Wisconsin by educating the public about their ecology and aesthetic value. They have worked with the DNR to design a Wisconsin Wildcard about Chimney Swifts, they support saving chimneys known to be used by swifts, work with chimney sweeps and masons, engage new partners and have produced a 2 page flyer for homeowners. To be a good swift landlord clean your chimney in March or April or after October and keep the damper closed during the summer, do not use pesticides, plant natives and document them on ebird. Swift Night Out is a continent wide event to count swifts entering their roosts during migration. They will migrate during the day and roost at night in chimneys. Pat Ready showed a video he had made while participating in a Swift Night Out showing many swifts entering a chimney and there is one on their website-[www.wiswifts.org](http://www.wiswifts.org). They also have plans for constructing a Swift Tower which mimics a chimney and has been somewhat successful in attracting nesting swifts.

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

President Pat Ready then introduced the next program, Falconry. Abbie and Joe Kumrie run River Valley Raptors along with their intern Fernanda. Joe works for the DNR and this is a non profit side business for them. Falconry is an ancient sport with evidence found in caves that hunting wild quarry with a trained bird of prey occurred 4,000-5,000 years ago. It was prevalent in the Middle East and UK. Their presentation included live birds, the first being a Merlin named Rocket. Merlins are forest birds, known in the past as Queen’s birds. Falconry

lost out to gunpowder and is now a hobby sport. It has been in the US since the 1940's and there are currently 100-120 licensed falconers in Wisconsin. The next bird we saw was a Red-tailed Hawk named Danny. Danny is a female, going into her 3<sup>rd</sup> hunting season. She is 2 years old who was captured by them at 4 months old. It took 4 weeks to train her with food as a positive reinforcement. She will be able to go back to the wild at some point. She hunts squirrels, cottontails, jack rabbits and pheasant. Most of what they catch is used to feed the birds in their care. In order to get a trained bird ready to release they use a pen with a chute to deliver food. They do not interact with the bird, delivering food by the chute for one month and at the end of that time the bird will no longer be responsive to humans and will be wild enough to release. The next bird was Jenny, a Kestrel. Kestrels eat large insects, sparrows and voles. They can see ultraviolet light and can spot this in urine trails. They are used by vineyards to chase grape eaters away and House Sparrow and Starling control. Abbie and Joe partner with the Coulee Region Humane Society and will take injured birds to rehab in one of their flight cages. Jenny the Kestrel is blind in one eye so is not a releasable bird and is used as an ambassador to educate the public. The last bird introduced to us was a Gyrfalcon that they have only had for 3 weeks and is not named yet. They are an arctic species and can fly very fast. This bird is a 15 year old, not releasable as it was captive bred and human imprinted. It was owned by a business that was sold and should live another 6-7 years in captivity. There are falconry meets held with sky trials, speed trials and agility trials. In Wisconsin they can hunt for rabbit and squirrel year round but they do not hunt them in summer.

"Ask the Bluebird Experts" panel discussion followed. The participants were Pat Ready, Fred Craig, Steve Sample and Gene Birr. Gene Birr introduced the "Skylight" box as a means of deterring House Sparrows. This box has an open top to let light into the box, covered with clear plexiglass. He has had good luck with the 6 boxes he has and feels it is 90-95% effective. It will need vents for heat if we ever have a hot summer. He also uses the Noel guards for raccoons. Pat Ready stated that he used this box for 2 seasons, the 1<sup>st</sup> season it worked well but the 2<sup>nd</sup> season a House Sparrow used it, filling the top with grasses to exclude the light so he is still using the Van Ert trap.

Gene Birr commented that he had an ant problem and tried cinnamon under the nest and around the post. When he checked the next week the ants were gone and the nestlings were healthy. Other members commented that they have also had good success with cinnamon. Pat Ready has heard of using bay leaves but that it didn't seem to work for him. A member commented that she used at least one tablespoon of cinnamon under the nest to be effective. Steve Sample commented that he had success with Permethrin sprayed under the box. Pat Ready stated that it is sold as a tick repellent and can be found at sporting goods stores. Steve Sample said to spray the outside of the box as a black fly repellent but not to spray the nest as it is a neurotoxin. One member reported using a 5% bleach solution to clean the boxes in the spring and fall and that seemed to keep the ants away. Pat Ready reported that he automatically treats his boxes in June by spraying the outside of box, that a spray bottle costs

between \$5-\$6 and is enough to treat the boxes over a couple of seasons. A member questioned if anyone used a bead of tanglefoot to keep ants from the boxes. Steve cautioned that it should be put just underneath the box. A member commented that he had 50 boxes with the plexiglass tops for 2 years and is very happy with them, no sparrow predation. A member asked about using diatomaceous earth for ants and Pat said that might work but was very messy. Fred Craig advised that there are more than one type of Permethrin concentrations sold and to be careful and not overspray it. He also advises keeping the vegetation away from the base of the post to deter ants.

A member questioned how close to a tree could you put a nest box and have it attract bluebirds. Pat Ready stated that some say the best location is in a large tree's dripline but the more open the better. A member stated that boxes in a prairie setting did better once it was mowed around the boxes and questioned if it was a good idea to keep it mowed. Others commented that in their experience mowing did help. Sometimes people do not like having to mow around boxes, some have had boxes that were knocked down by mowers.

A few members reported that they had bluebird chicks that were ready to fledge and then died. Pat Ready wondered if black flies were to blame. Another member questioned if boxes should be cleaned out in winter. Pat said it was a good idea if you can, sometimes a woodpecker or chickadee will use the box for roosting. However, if mice get in there it will foul the box bad. Fred Craig said you should never get a mouse on your house. He has a design that uses pvc over a fence post with the nest box mounted to the pvc. He can raise the height of the box to keep cats from reaching it and lower it to monitor. He keeps car wax on the pvc to deter raccoons. One member reported finding a tree frog in a nest box and said that they will eat eggs & nestlings, one member reported a flying squirrel in a box and Pat Ready has found a bat in a nest box.

President Pat Ready adjourned the meeting at 2:55 PM