



# Driftless Prairies: Native Ecosystems

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# Bluebird Trails

Since 2005, Jim has monitored 16 bluebird boxes, known as the Hess Trail. In the 3 years we have monitored, we fledged a total of 94 babies. Click on the Hess Trail and you'll see up-to-date numbers. In 2011, we have expanded to 24 boxes and he plans to ride his bike to check them! Keeping it eco-friendly where we can! When he checked on Sunday, we had 6 nests and 4 eggs.



Boxes need to be placed about 100 yards apart. Most of our boxes are along the highway on the land of our wonderful neighbors. This is ideal because Eastern Bluebirds like open country. They are ground feeders and like to fly from their perch to snap up some tasty insect on the ground.

We love hearing their cute little "cheer cheerful charmer" song and seeing the babies trying to fledge. It wasn't that long ago that Eastern Bluebirds were a rare site. On Sunday,

April 17, we attended the 30 year celebration of the Lafayette County Bluebird Society. When this group began, there were only 4 documented mating bluebird pairs in Wisconsin. With the 94 total members and 27 total trails, they have fledged into the thousands of bluebirds over the years; in 2010 the total count was 549. Thanks to the many individuals who monitor trails, the bluebirds are back and here to stay!

Our boxes are inhabited by tree swallows and chickadees as well. Sometimes, we have wrens who take over. We discourage this by moving the boxes further from a wooded area. Wrens and bluebirds are not friends; the wrens are very aggressive toward bluebirds and will kill the young and sometimes the female sitting on the nest.



Our bluebird boxes house other species as well. Sometimes chickadees build their homes there with their moss-lined nests. Tree swallows are frequent nesters, filling the box with soft, insulating feathers. This pictures a pair checking out the boxes for this year. I love the “liquid warble” as I call it, of the tree swallow song.



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