

# Eastern Bluebird Trail



The comeback of the eastern bluebird in Wisconsin is truly an American conservation success story. The bluebird has long been a symbol for happiness, good health, and hope in America. Native Americans included them in their artwork and hung hallowed gourds around their refuse piles

and meat cutting areas to attract bluebirds, which would eat the pesky bugs attracted to these areas. Early American farmers built and hung nest boxes for Bluebirds to help control insects harmful to their crops. In modern times the bluebird was featured in Disney's song "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah," and in "Somewhere over the Rainbow" from the Wizard of Oz.

But despite all this popularity, bluebird populations fell drastically from 1920 – 1970, so much so that some thought they might become extinct. The decline was due to loss of habitat, pesticide use, weather changes, and snag (dead tree) removal, but the main problem was the introduction of European starlings and house sparrows that outcompeted bluebirds for nesting sites. The June 1979 Breeding Bird Survey by the United States Geological Survey observed only 22 bluebirds in the entire state of Wisconsin, and by the mid 1980s it was estimated their populations had declined by 90%. Groups such as the [North American Bluebird Society](#), Lafayette County Bluebird Society (LCBS) and [Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin](#) (BRAW) were formed in the 1970s and 80s to combat this problem; they created bluebird trails and conducted nest box campaigns to provide more nesting opportunities for the bluebirds. These efforts included the introduction of nest boxes designed especially for bluebirds that have smaller entrance holes to keep out the larger European starling. The

[Simple Box](#), which is the official box of LCBS.

The Driftless Prairies' Bluebird Trail consists of 26 nest boxes utilizing all three box designs with 6 boxes in our prairies and 20 boxes along our county road, as the boxes need to be about 100 yards apart. These boxes are monitored weekly from April to September with a weekly report sent to LCBS and year-end report sent to BRAW. Our data is included with hundreds of other volunteer reports growing the Wisconsin data base to over 20,000 bluebirds being fledged and monitored each year, which is shared with North American Bluebird Society.

<b>Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Data</b>					
Year	No. of Boxes	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	BB Fledged	Fledglings per Box
2008	8	23	19	12	1.5
2009	12	39	33	31	2.6
2010	16	86	65	42	2.6
2011	24	122	92	86	3.6
2012*	26	169	125	114	4.4
2013	26	139	118	87	3.3
2014	26	145	123	103	4.0
2015	26	133	117	103	4.0
2016	26	155	122	98	3.8
2017	26	133	110	81	3.1
2018	26	128	106	85	3.3
2019**	26	125	83	59	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>1,397</b>	<b>1,113</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>3.4</b>

\*2012 was an early warm spring.

\*\*2019 major problem with gnats and black flies