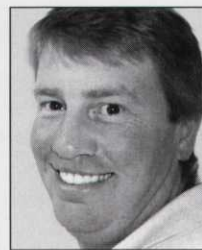


Golf Courses Miss the Mark When it Comes to Bluebirds



By PAUL DIEGNAU, CGCS
Keller Golf Course

With spring approaching, I thought it would be nice to depart from topics related to invasive species. As the new chair of the MGCSA Environmental Committee, I would like to discuss one of my favorite subjects, bluebird trails. In the next few paragraphs, I will try to make a case for MORE golf courses becoming bluebird sanctuaries

First and foremost, golf course properties are IDEAL for attracting bluebirds. This is an undeniable fact. The short-mowed turfgrass found on golf courses



provides incredible forage space for these "gems of blue". Bluebirds prefer insects of all types, and as we know, golf courses harbor great quantities and varieties of insects. From perches above the turf, they spy their prey and pounce. When rearing young they feed constantly. On a small scale, bluebirds are a bio-control tool to help keep insect populations in check.

Starting a bluebird trail does not have to be expensive or time consuming. If you or someone on staff have basic wood-working skills, nest boxes can be built very economically. They can also be purchased pre-made at many stores and there are many outlets for nest boxes on the web. If you choose to build your own, always fasten with screws in conjunction with a quality exterior adhesive. This will save you on repair time in future years. I would also recommend purchasing a quality reference book on bluebird trails

or at the very least, use the Internet to research the subject. There are many types of bluebird nest boxes and variations on entrance hole sizes and shapes. The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) and the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota are valuable resources that are more than willing to help answer your questions.

When starting your first bluebird trail, I would recommend starting small and increasing the size of your trail as time and resources permit. Here at Keller GC, we started with 32 boxes nine years ago and eventually expanded to 72 boxes. Our trail is primarily located in rough areas around the perimeter of the golf course. The boxes on our trail are paired, meaning two boxes are mounted within 25 feet of each other at each site. Pairing boxes is done in areas with high populations of tree swallows. This procedure eliminates competition between the two species, as each species will occupy a box and live in

harmony. Therefore, our 72-box trail actually has only 36 nest sites. Nest box sites should be a minimum of 100 yards from each other. Never mount boxes on trees, wooden fence posts or fencing. Anything that can be climbed is a dinner invitation to raccoons, feral cats, opossums, and snakes. Ideally, boxes should be mounted a minimum of five feet off the ground on smooth, metal posts at least one inch in diameter. Entrance holes should face east to northeast whenever possible. Such an orientation reduces nestling exposure to precipitation and hot, afternoon sun. It is also advisable to keep nest boxes away from woodlands with underbrush. Such locations will often attract house wrens.

Now that you have installed a trail, you will need to monitor it. This component of bluebird trail maintenance is non-negotiable. Boxes must be checked at least once per week starting sometime in mid-

April and continue through the summer months until all nesting activity has ceased. The number one reason for monitoring a bluebird trail is the European house sparrow. European house sparrows



Eastern Bluebird, Male

are an invasive European species brought to North America in 1850 and now thought to be the most abundant wild bird species in North America - imagine that! They compete directly with bluebirds for nesting cavities and boxes. Once a male house sparrow has claimed a nest box and a territory as his own, he will defend it to the bitter end. These birds can be extremely vicious, destroying eggs and attacking and killing nestlings and adult bluebirds. House sparrow nests MUST BE REMOVED from the trail on a regular basis and, under no circumstances, should young house sparrows successfully fledge from a nest box. Monitoring is also necessary for record keeping, removing old nests prior to second and third nestings

(Continued on Page 11)

Bluebirds—

(Continued from Page 10)

and identifying and fixing various problems that appear on the trail throughout the summer. Without a trail monitor, bluebird trails are counterproductive. Therefore, such trails should be removed. The same can be said for unmonitored



purple martin houses that double as house sparrow production factories. Please monitor them or take them down - native cavity-nesting birds will thank you!

If you don't have the time to monitor your trail on a weekly basis, it is time to look for help. At Keller GC, we have two

families that volunteer to monitor our trail on a weekly basis and both have been doing so for many years. We keep a weekly record of activity for each and every nest box on our trail. Finding a trail monitor for your trail could be as simple as asking your membership for volunteers. Birding is a popular pastime in the U.S. and your members may pleasantly surprise you with their knowledge and interest in birds. It never hurts to ask! If you are unsuccessful exploring the membership avenue, I would suggest you contact your local or regional nature center. These facilities work with many volunteers and often maintain lists of residents looking for volunteer opportunities. Once again, a quality reference book is helpful for training volunteers, if needed.

So why should you get involved with bluebirds? The reasons are endless but here are a few:

~ Take personal pride and satisfaction in knowing that you are assisting with the recovery of bluebird populations.

~ Once your trail is set up, time and monetary requirements are minimal.

~ Another arrow to shoot back at the anti-golf community.



~ Endear your environmentalist friends.

~ Educate, enlighten, and raise the awareness of your membership or customers regarding bluebirds and your bluebird trail.

~ A great public relations project with highly visible results.

~ Watching these birds, up close and personal, develop from eggs to beautiful blue adults may stir something deep inside you. It can be addicting!

~ Another valuable tool to help keep insect populations in check.

~ Provides a reason to dust off your woodworking skills and put them to use.

~ You may just like it!!!!!!

“You Customize Your Fleet; We Customize Your Lease”



Davis Sun Turf and Wells Fargo Financial Leasing Offers:

Flexible Options:

- True Lease
- \$1 Buyout Lease
- Capital Lease

-We will lease new or used equipment (no color preference)

-Set up repayment schedule that fits your needs

For sales and lease information call Chad, Jay, Jeff, Mark, Tom or Troy at:

800-952-9513

www.davissunturf.com