



# TURFGRASS MATTERS

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## At Nature's Best: Cavity Nesting Birds and Golf Courses

Enhancing cavity nesting bird populations in the Mid-Atlantic region could happen by nature's own course; or on the other hand, could suffer as easily. Here are a few ways that golf course superintendents could help and why.

There are many birds in this region that are referred to as cavity-nesting birds. Cavities as simple as a hole in a tree or other man-made structures house these birds from the elements as well as protect them from predators. Since their introduction in the latter part of the 19th century, two species, the European Starling and the English House Sparrow, have multiplied ten-fold. Due to the significant competition for nesting space, our more desirable native birds are suffering. This article will focus on the fate of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia Sialis*).

During the 60's and early 70's, the National Park Service along with local parks, and various Audubon societies were very concerned about the declining Bluebird populations. They were determined to remedy the problem. Hence, the design of the Bluebird box by Lawrence Zeleny of Silver Spring, MD, an instrumental part of the North American Bluebird Society. Since the project was started, the bluebird populations have increased remarkably.

Each eighteen-hole golf course is capable of handling at least thirty Bluebird Boxes. Depending on the size, location, and intensity of adjacent building populations, the most ideal locations for these small dwellings are at the outside bound-

aries of the golf course property. Fence lines are very ideal sites. Space them approximately 75 yards apart and about 6 feet from the ground.

It is important to know the establishment and maintenance criteria for these boxes. Key factors are timing and design. Designs, plans and detailed instructions to make Bluebird boxes can be obtained from your federal, state or local Park service and/or by contacting the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. Ask them how to start your own "Bluebird Trail!"

In this region, bluebirds begin to search for nesting sites as early as mid-March. They will begin pairing-up and building nests through mid-April. This is a good time to appoint a willing staff member to monitor the boxes. After settling down, a pair may have up to three hatches in a season. The common end to the Bluebird's hatching season is mid-August. Once egg-laying has begun, it will take only 10-15 days for them to hatch and approximately 20 more days for them to fledge the nest. These increments of time tend to dictate a frequency of monitoring. Picking a day, once a week, from the beginning of nesting season to the end of August is an ideal frequency to catch all phases and appropriately time one of the most important tasks. Once the fledglings have flown the nest, remove all of the old nesting materials. The most common designs will allow for easy access; side access for cleaning and top access for monitoring. This will prepare the

box for the next brood. At the beginning of each season, it is a good idea to clean, inspect and repair all boxes to have a fresh start.

Dealing with undesirable birds such as a house sparrow can become a problem. The size of the entry hole is the best deterrent for most birds but not those that are similar in size. A once-a-week check can eliminate intrusion by removing nesting materials that you have observed being placed by undesirable birds or by removing what would constitute non-typical nesting materials for bluebirds. Once undesirable birds have laid eggs, you be the judge. Other acceptable birds you may allow to use the nest boxes Tree Swallows, Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, House Wrens, and if you are really lucky, the Great Crested Flycatcher. In marshy areas, you may stumble upon a Prothonotary Warbler.

continued on page 3

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## Bullets from the Boardroom

MAAGCS Secretary - Nick Vance, CGCS



To date about 70% of the postcards that were mailed out with the dues statement have been returned. If you have not mailed your card to the office yet, please do so ASAP. We want to be able to make all of the necessary changes in the new directory.



We are continuing to implement as many of the ideas taken from the focus groups this winter as possible. The one item that came up the most was communication, but we must all remember that communication is a party line. The membership must be a part of that line.



The average attendance at our 1997 meetings were as follows: Class A & B - 43, Class C - 13 and Class F - 35. That means our average attendance for our monthly meetings was 91.



The MAAGCS has started a pretty good library of videos. We now have 134 tapes on hand and they are being kept at our office in Virginia. If anyone would like to borrow any of them please call Mrs. Charlotte Norris at 1-888-MID-TURF. The library at this time has some of the following tapes: Par for the Course - 1994 thru 1997, 1996 Opening Session (tapes #1 & #2), 1996 Gala (tapes #1 & #2), The Environmental Answer - Golf Course and Pesticides, 1996 Image Spots, ESPN Feature Segments 1-4, Special Interest Spots, Assuring Golf's Value, The Softspikes Revolution, Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Schools, Golf and the Environment 1995-96 and 1997, and last but not least To Serve...To Advance...To Enrich - GCSAA Membership Benefits & Services.



It looks like a Web Site is coming for the Mid-Atlantic in the near future. We are researching the costs at this time. We will keep you informed.



The Board of Directors would like to remind all Certified Superintendents that we need to update our list of attestors. If you would like to be an attestor please contact Walter Montross, CGCS at Westwood Country Club.

## Nature's Best

continued from page 1

From the initial planning stages to implementation and continued care, you should be able to increase your bluebird population immensely. Your enjoyment in this is equal to your involvement. Try to recruit members or regular golfers! They will have a great time.

*Mike Donovan is an active member of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society who has been studying birds since he was a young boy growing up in England. Since moving to this area in 1971 he has developed and augmented his talents tremendously in observation, enhancement and identification of the bird populations in the Mid-Atlantic region as well as those of the entire United States. Mike currently works at Norbeck Country Club in Rockville, MD and will be a featured writer in future publications.*