



A Good Year For B

by Peggy Boike, Bluebird Trail Monitor at Chisago Lakes Golf Club

Bluebirds have been in the news lately - record numbers of young bluebirds were reported all around the state this year. And, that's certainly the case for the bluebird trail at the Chisago Lakes Golf Course in Lindstrom, as 71 new bluebird chicks fledged from 13 nest boxes, an average of 5.5 chicks per nest box location. This is the highest number of fledglings since I took over as the bluebird trail monitor in 2007 - not bad, but could be better.

I report my statistics every year

(eggs laid, eggs hatched, young fledged) to the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota (BBRP). In 2011 the BBRP received 525 reports from Minnesotans, including 38 from golf course trail monitors. If you monitor bluebird houses, whether on a golf course or elsewhere, BBRP would like to hear from you. To learn more about this organization and the work it's been doing since 1979 to help the bluebird, visit their website at: bbrp.org.

The 2012 season at Chisago

Bluebirds!

rates is how many boxes actually attract bluebirds. This is where the “fledged per nest box location” statistic is important to consider. A good rule of thumb is that if a location (usually a pair of nest boxes) has not attracted bluebirds for two years, it’s time to make a change. Sometimes moving a nest box a short distance will do the trick.

For example, a pair of nest boxes on the course was located in what I thought was perfect bluebird habitat. Tree swallows nested there in past years, but never bluebirds. At the BBRP Expo in April, I learned that bluebirds like to be at the highest elevation in the area, so I moved the pair of boxes from the side of the knoll to the top, and that was all it took to attract a nesting pair of bluebirds. That helped to increase my “fledged per nest box location” value.

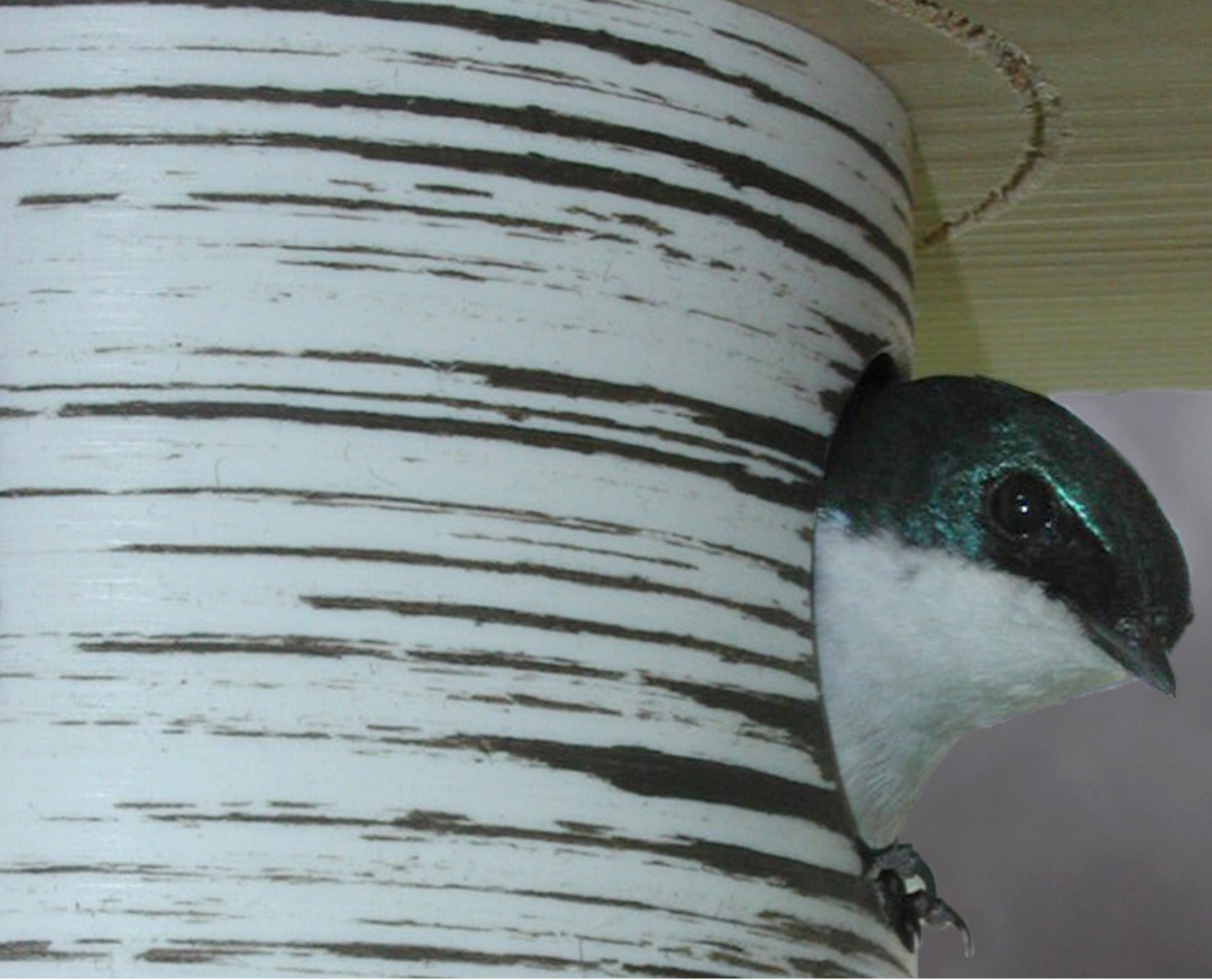
What else can impact that value?

Opposite: Building the nest. Below: First born of four.

Lakes GC started earlier than usual, with the first bluebird egg being laid on April 17th, nine days earlier than last year. That pair of “early birds” nested three times this year, an unusual occurrence this far north. Typically, the nesting season in our area is long enough to support only two nestings.

Another aspect of a bluebird trail that obviously contributes to higher fledging





Predators are always a concern. The nest boxes on my trail are mounted on BBRP-recommended polished metal conduit poles, but some kind of predator occasionally gets into a box. Stovepipe predator guards have helped, but in several cases, I believe the boxes were mounted too close to an object - in one case a short out-of-bounds stake from which a predator was able to leap onto the box. I moved them further from the objects, which apparently fixed the problem.

Each year brings new challenges to a bluebird trail monitor. Next spring I may have to move a nest box that has been very productive in the past, because it's located in an area where small evergreens were planted for future landscaping needs. But the trees have grown, and it is no longer a suitable nest box location.

Golf courses have a limited number of suitable nest box locations.

the box in the evergreen area. When the trees are transplanted elsewhere on the course in the future, I can mount a nest box there again.

When nesting season is over, I take down the boxes and store them over winter, but I delay doing this task until late October for a very important reason. In late summer and early fall, bluebirds repeatedly lead their young back to the nest boxes around the course, apparently teaching them how to find suitable nest cavities of their own. This interesting behavior is fascinating to watch.

Let's hope next year's bluebird season will be as great as 2012 was!

Opposite: A pesky neighbor. Below Gene Rabel moves a nest

Ideally, boxes should be placed at least 1,000 feet apart to accommodate bluebirds' territorial requirements. Installing too many boxes for the property size is counterproductive. Also, they should not be placed where they might interfere with golfers or grounds maintenance personnel. Sometimes the only option is to remove a nestbox, and that may be the case with

