



There are two bluebird trails at Badger Army Ammunition Plant.

Initially the bluebird trails at Badger were part of a study assessing risks to wildlife from exposure to residual soil contamination left by the Army. John Schubring was a guard at the plant and he assisted with that study. Over the years, he has become an expert in the houses, predator guards, and habitat of bluebirds.

The bluebird trails at Badger are now part of a national effort to monitor and increase the production of the Eastern Bluebird and other native cavity-nesting birds.

For many generations, bluebirds used to live in orchards and around pastures, nesting in tree hollows, holes in fence posts and such. Urban sprawl and rural subdivisions have diminished their needed habitat. Changes in agriculture practices and competition from the House (English) Sparrow and European Starling have also affected bluebird populations.

Setting out nest boxes for displaced bluebirds was initially an experiment. When researchers realized the birds took to the nest boxes, it became a matter of building a better nest box and placing the nest box in the most desirable habitat. Bluebirds are grassland birds and do not like encroaching shrubs. Other cavity nesters such as tree swallows and house wrens prefer shrubby habitat for nesting.

Employing predator guards on bluebird houses improves the chances for chicks to successfully fledge (leave the nest). Car-waxed PVC pipe slipped over the metal stand post act as a predator guard. An extra square of wood around the properly-sized entry hole affords additional protection.

Volunteers Bill and Donna Stehling and John Schubring monitor bluebird nests from about April through August and perhaps a bit of September, depending on the weather and the birds. They report their data to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin in September.

Each week for each house, volunteers count nests, type of nest, number of eggs, number of hatchlings (chicks), and number that fledge. They note problems with predators. They deal with wasp nests, blow flies, and ants. There's also extreme weather. They record time, temperature, wind, and sky conditions.

The bluebirds do not seem to mind when these trained volunteers quietly check their nests on a limited basis. However, it is very important that visitors do not disturb nesting birds and other wildlife.

Bluebirds build grass nests. They usually have pale blue eggs.

Tree swallows start with a grass nest and then add feathers. These are usually white eggs with speckles. Wrens pack their houses with sticks, grass, stringy bits from tarps, and even cellophane. They have small reddish eggs with speckles – and have up to eight tiny eggs.

Male bluebirds arrive early and pick out the house. When females arrive, the males offer their mates grass and flutter their wings. Both parents may feed the hatchlings and they may raise three broods in a season. The early broods of bluebird fledges may stick around and assist their parents in feeding the succeeding hatchlings which is good practice for their first year as parents.

All birds are sensitive to loud, sudden or continuous noise. Birds hear the low and high sounds people do not hear as well.

Loud disruptive activities like an ATV track and gun range will negatively affect birds at Badger.

Opportunities to support bluebird conservation in the Badger/Sauk Prairie area

- ❖ Those interested in bluebirds can go online and find the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW). Anyone interested in creating a neighborhood trail and collecting data, or a trail on the Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital grounds may contact Dr. Kent Hall at BRAW.
- ❖ **VOICE YOUR OPPOSITION** to an ATV trail and gun range at Badger Army Ammunition Plant. Sign the online petition to the Wisconsin DNR at www.cswab.org/get-involved/alerts
- ❖ For citizen scientists, opportunities are available. Check the Cornell Lab of Ornithology site online and browse the options for learning to bird as well as backyard counts, migratory bird counts, and the Christmas count. This can be family or neighborhood fun. Neighborhoods can definitely create their own bird trails.
- ❖ For additional information about birding, check with your local public libraries.
- ❖ Here in Sauk County, there are a number of communities that have qualified for Bird City status including Sauk City, Prairie du Sac, Spring Green, and Baraboo. In fact, Wisconsin ranks second nationally in the proportion of citizens considered birders – 33% of our population watches birds! For more information visit <http://www.birdcitywisconsin.org>
- ❖ The bluebird is just one of many bird species found at Badger. There is at least one bald eagle nest, and osprey, red-tailed hawks, herons and cranes hunt at Badger. Other areas are home to bobolinks, meadowlarks and other grassland birds. And yes, a badger does live at Badger, however they are not sociable creatures.

RESOURCE:

*Stehling, Donna. Birds in Flight, 2014.
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Bluebird Conservation

on the
Badger Tallgrass Prairie



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