

It is now officially fall. The birds have finished nesting, and some are already on their way to their wintering grounds. When we visit the trail, the absence of bird song and bird activity is notable. The birds have finished their job, and what a great job they did. Little do they know that they helped achieve a milestone this year – the trail has now fledged 20,024 birds!

Mountain Bluebirds fledged 254 this year (a new record), Western Bluebirds 426, Tree Swallows 4, White-breasted Nuthatches, 5 and House Wrens, 6. Durr road also did well with 85 Mountain and 12 Western Bluebirds fledged (the Durr road fledglings are not included in the 20,024).

For us humans, fall is a time for teams. Baseball is preparing for the World Series next month; Football is in full swing; high school Cross Country teams are out running. You may have a favorite sport or a favorite team that you root for. I would like to talk a little bit about a team I root for -Team Bluebird.

There are many different members of Team Bluebird. There are Bluebird sponsors, Bluebird volunteers and in our case, Bluebird trail founders. The trail was started by some hardy folks with the idea of helping the bluebirds. And help bluebirds they did! Who could have known what a success the trail would be. Over the years, we have lost many of the trail founders – they are dearly missed. I'm sure that 20,000 plus birds fledged would make them smile.

Next, our Team Bluebird sponsors. Your ongoing support of the trail is inspiring. Because of you the trail has grown, boxes have been replaced when needed and word of the trail and its occupants has spread state-wide. What caring and generous people you are. Thank you!

We have lost some of our wonderful sponsors these past few years as well. Many now have memorial boxes in their names. I've grown fond of many sponsors over the years, and I miss those who are gone.

Finally, there are our Team Bluebird volunteers. We are fortunate to have a great group of hard working, dedicated people who brave snow, mud, insects, snakes, heat, dust, wind, House sparrows and chipmunks – if you've ever had a chipmunk run up your arm you would understand why I include them – to clean and monitor the boxes. Our Bluebird volunteers are the best. Thank you to this year's volunteers: Nancy Born and her team "Blue Jeans," Deborah Severtson Coffin, Terry and Dale Critchlow, Becky and Dick Drew, Martha Fleming, Jan and Judy Gano, Betsy Martin, Sara and Ron Montgomery, and Jenifer Parsons. Thank you as well to Richard Repp for his invaluable assistance contacting sponsors about their payments, and to my dear husband Joe, who is my right-hand man. He helps with all parts of the trail – cleaning, monitoring, repair and replacement of boxes and helping me get the numbers correct for the report. He's the co-chair without the title.

I appreciate all of you, and I want to thank those of you who have given me positive feedback about the trail. This is a labor of love for me, and it is so nice to hear that you love the trail and the birds as well.

- Karen Zook, Vredenburg Caretaker AKA Chair