

The Old and the Young

By Patrick Ready, Editor

Many years ago the Goth farm west of Madison was developed into a country subdivision. The location is a couple of miles out on Old Sauk Road. Goth Park is a small park that backs up to the yards of the subdivision. Years ago someone decided the park would be good for a bluebird trail. They built and installed 10 Peterson boxes. When I drove by I could see a couple of the old boxes and often wondered if anyone was caring for them.

This spring the Wild Birds Unlimited store I work at on Old Sauk Road hired a Middleton high school girl, Avery Sampson who just happens to live out in the Goth Park area. One day she



Messy boxes filled with sparrow and mice nests. No deterrent for Avery.

told me she bought a bluebird house and put it up in her yard and thought she had chickadees moving in. We started discussing nest boxes and I asked her if she knew anything about the trail in Goth Park. She thought the houses were let go and were no longer being monitored. That happens so often.

I told her they are now probably full of House Sparrow or House Wrens nests or mice. Not much chance bluebirds were able to nest in them these days.

Avery decided to get her dad to go out with her and check all the boxes and clean them out. It was pretty disgusting. She sent me a photo of one of the boxes full of a House Sparrow nest-years of decaying material. Some boxes had mice nest and smelled really bad by her report.

All the boxes were emptied out and thoroughly cleaned. It was still early in the season and cold so she left the boxes open to air out. After a week or so she closed them up hoping for at least one bluebird pair to show up.

On days when we were scheduled to work together we would touch base on what was happening on the trail. Birds were starting to nest but she wasn't sure what species were building in the boxes. I gave her a copy of the *Guide to Cavity Nesters* and showed her how different bird species build their nests. Of course early on with just grass pieces it was hard to tell but as the nest developed she would be able to tell what she had. Naturally several boxes were getting House Sparrows. She recognized the messy nest and constantly removed them. One box had some mice move back in. She let them stay.

It took a few weeks but one day she came in and said she had bluebirds!! At least 2 boxes had nests with blue eggs. I told her to keep checking the boxes at least once per week and keep track of what she found. Sometime she and her boyfriend Riley Gaines would make the rounds and I'd get periodic reports. Early on ants became a problem in almost all of her boxes. We discussed methods of control and she tried a few. Later on she told me they never did leave. She believes she lost a brood of 5 chicks because of the ants. Eventually House Wrens showed up



The pay off . . . the cleaned out boxes got her some bluebirds!!!

so a few boxes were filled with sticks and happy wrens.

Near the end of the season I asked her one day how it was going. She said she had a bluebird nest with 4 chicks and then one day only 2. She wasn't sure what happened to the missing birds. She didn't think it was raccoons. Maybe it was House Sparrows?

Avery's efforts resulted in 5 bluebird nests that she believes were made by 2 different pair. There were some ups and downs but this old trail was revived by a young bluebirder. Eventually she did fledge 20 bluebirds which I told her was fantastic since that trail was let go for so long and most likely wasn't producing bluebirds anymore.

Now it is. She did a good thing!



Avery checks one of her old nest boxes she adopted this summer. This fall she will be a Senior at Middleton High School.

Riley Gaines photo