

# MACALESTER COLLEGE

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55101

■ DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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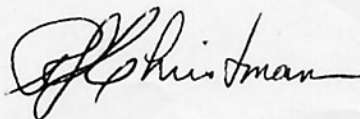
Subject: BLUEBIRDS at ORDWAY.

Despite the fact that there has been a general decline in the population of the Eastern Bluebird (Sialia sialis), we are fortunate at Ordway in having a good representation of this most pleasing bird-fellow. Last summer (1971) there were three nesting-pairs within a hundred yards of the Station and there were thirteen young produced from these matings. In the final days of their stay (early November) the local residents were joined by others until they numbered 60 before they left very abruptly one day (Nov. 13) for their southern wintering grounds.

The bluebird nests in stumps or tree hollows and since it is not well-equipped for the task of excavating wooden cavities it has to depend upon those which result from natural decay; hence, the millions of fence posts which appeared on our farmlands since the early 19th century have been adapted by the bluebird as nesting-spots and now their replacement with metal posts has caused a decline in the reproduction of these birds during the past two or three decades. At Ordway we have started a modest program of providing potential nesting-spots for bluebirds by putting out nesting-boxes. The results have been quite pleasing, as evidenced by a local increase in population.

On Mar. 14th the first bluebirds returned this year - a pair of them, who spent a great deal of time in surveying the nesting-boxes which had been used last year. The sudden snowstorm on Mar. 27th gave a setback to these prospective home-makers.

One of the quieter of the birds - its song is unbelievably soft and gentle - it can be quite fierce in contesting for territory or in defending its nest and nestlings. In fact, one of the most spectacularly beautiful things one can see is a pair of male bluebirds contesting for their territory rights - a contest which sometimes rages for a couple of weeks and ends with one male retreating and permitting the victor to begin mating and nesting activities. It is truly one of the nice things to watch at Ordway - the annual arrival of these beautiful blue-backed thrushes.



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