

OUTDOORSUPDATE

Workshop Draws Large Crowd Of Curious Bluebird Enthusiasts

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

Bluebirds like a clean house. There were more tips and information like this sage piece of advice discussed last Sunday afternoon (Feb. 27) at the Corps of Discovery Welcome Center on the Nebraska bluffs during the annual Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) Workshop. Lawrence Fuchs of Belden, Neb., and David Jeffcoat of Yankton spent two hours talking to a standing-room-only crowd. The pair played a bluebird video for the first minutes and then talked about bluebird boxes and answered questions fired at them.

The new coordinator for the Yankton County Bluebird group is Jeffcoat who took over the reigns from Ken Henseler. Fairly new to blue birding, he only has about two years of bluebird watching under his belt.

"It is so exciting to keep track of a bluebird family and watch the process of the new eggs hatching and growing," said Jeffcoat. "I check them every week to see their progress and watch for predators." He now has two boxes on his acreage west of Yankton which are only about 50 yards from his house. His success with those boxes pushed him to inquire a neighboring farmer if he could place boxes along the pasture fence line close to his property. Now he monitors four additional boxes and has become addicted to "chasing them."

The new coordinator position allows Jeffcoat to keep a supply of bluebird necessities on hand, answer questions from fellow birders and assist newcomers to the hobby with getting started. He keeps a few nest boxes on hand for setup and helps other blue birders with location issues. Where to set up the nesting boxes is probably one of the main steps in getting bluebird families to spend time in someone's box.

"Once I got a bluebird family to hatch in one of my boxes, they became a repeat visitor," said Jeffcoat. "Sometimes bluebirds hatch 2-3 times in a year. I really, really enjoy it."

"It's worth it even if you only get one," said Lorrie Thunker of rural Crofton. She and husband Vern have been at several bluebird workshops and are always looking for new answers to problems they have with their bluebird boxes. Listening to other's problems and solutions gives other bluebird lovers ideas for their own projects.

For most of the questions from the bluebirding crowd, Fuchs had an answer. He has been bluebirding long before the bird lover's hobby became fashionable and is the county coordinator for Cedar and Dixon Counties in Nebraska. He now 'chases bluebird boxes' to the tune of 40 bird homes but readily admits not all the boxes are homes for the treasured blue bird.

Fuchs had a basket full of a variety of bluebird boxes and listed the pros and cons of each one. A popular bluebird 'box' now is made from a four-inch PVC pipe. Along with Jeffcoat, the two coordinators talked about how to set up the boxes, where to place them and how to deal with predators and competitive bird species who are also looking for homes.

Fuchs spends many hours devising ways to discourage other bird species like wrens and sparrows from nesting in his special boxes. He gave many tips and suggestions to those who were stumped with bluebird problems. He even had to admit to one listener bluebirding is an active hobby. It just can't be done from a recliner inside house looking out the patio window.

"You need to monitor the birds on a regular basis to keep track of how the nest is progressing, are the eggs hatching, is something attacking the eggs or the mother bluebird," said Fuchs. "Keeping a diary of every visit is also important; especially when dealing with predators. You can keep track of what you do to discourage them and if it is successful." The bluebird association also appreciates a report from their members in September or October when the season is at its end on the success of their boxes or lack of success.

"A year or two ago, we lost a lot of baby bluebirds in the boxes we monitor because of the wet weather," said bluebird lover Donna Maibaum of Crofton as she emphasized the importance of monitoring the boxes. Along with her son Tony, they monitor the bluebird boxes along the Sheryl Mueller Bluebird Trail.

If new members joined at the workshop at a cost of \$25 for a three-year membership, they received a packet of contact information, dos and don'ts and also plans for building bluebird houses. Many bluebirders build their own nests but some excellent examples are sold online at www.bbne.org.

It's a great way to enjoy the birds, nature and get out for some exercise because 'chasing the boxes' is job best done on foot. For more information, Jeffcoat can be contacted at 605-665-1946 and Fuchs phone number is 402-985-2486.

OF THE OUTDOORS

The Original Ice Road Truckers Of LOTW

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

As we made our way out of Zippel Bay onto the Lake of the Woods (LOTW), and onto the recently plowed ice roads, I was amazed at what lay before me. For as far as the eye could see, there were hundreds, if not thousands of ice houses. One hundred ninety of these houses were rental icehouses out of Zippel Bay Resort www.zippel-bay.com.

We proceeded out onto the 30 miles of well-marked ice roads, roads that had been opened for the last thirty-four years by the crew from Zippel Bay Resort.

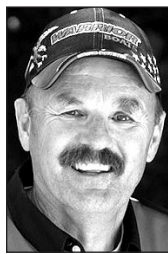
Team Outdoorsmen Adventures member Larry Myhre (Sioux City, Iowa) and I were fishing out of the resort, located on Zippel Bay, which allows easy access to the big lake.

Larry and I had come north to Fargo, N.D., a day earlier than we'd planned, hoping to beat a huge blizzard that would dump up to 18" of snow that would be whipped around by 20 MPH throughout southern North Dakota and the eastern half of South Dakota.

We'd be ice fishing one of Minnesota's largest lakes, LOTW which holds excellent populations of walleye, sauger, northerns, perch and muskies.

These ice roads made on the lake allow the resorts guests and other ice fisherman easy access to their icehouses.

We had no problem locating our ice house as each road was clearly marked with street signs and as we worked our way out to our house we traveled on ice roads with names such as Main, Perch, Walleye and Igloo.



Gary Howey

As we came off of the bay, before us lay almost every imaginable type of icehouse, from the Otter portables to huge two story structures. Many had Dish systems mounted on them, so you could only

imagine what other luxuries were contained within. Zippel Bay Resort is one of the many resorts on the lake, with each resort plowing ice roads to their icehouses, so there have been hundreds of miles of ice roads plowed on LOTW each winter.

We'd be fishing in that afternoon out of Zippel Bay Resort house 94, a well-lit heated icehouse as that's when the bite would be in the deeper water.

My Lindy Rattl'n Flyer Jig, tipped with a minnow head had just came to rest about 6 inches from the bottom when my Vexilar locator showed a red blip, indicating a fish, rising from the bottom. As I raised my rod slightly, I felt added weight and when I set the hook, I knew I'd hooked one of the thousands of smaller sauger that call LOTW home. After a short fight our first fish on the trip, a chunky 15" sauger came through the hole.

On a previous trip, we'd tried using whole minnows, but found that our bites increased by using just a minnow head along with smaller rattling bait.

Shortly after our first fish, Larry pulled another of the numerous sauger that we'd ice during this trip. During that afternoon, we pulled out two nice walleyes and more sauger



PHOTO: GARY HOWEY

The Igloo lounge, located out on the ice, gives anglers and snowmobilers an opportunity to take a break after a long day on the ice.

than I can count, with the majority of them coming using the rattling jig I mentioned previously.

As the ice forms on LOTW, the Minnesota walleye regulations change, allowing ice fishermen to take eight fish (4 walleye & 4 sauger) and to use two rods instead of the one-rod allowed through the rest of the year.

On LOTW, the bite generally starts shallow, moving deeper throughout the day and then back shallow again later in the day, so we'd follow the fish, shallow early, deep during the Midday and then back again shallow in the late afternoon.

On day two, the shallow bite wasn't what we'd hoped, so we moved deep, using Lindy's rattling bait as well as the Dater to attract fish into our area, catching them with rattling spoons and minnows suspended underneath a small float.

The smaller sauger were more than anxious to take our offering, with a few walleyes biting from time to time, including the largest one of the trip that I had on before losing it as it came through the hole.

functioning icehouse.

As it was mentioned earlier, there are numerous resorts on LOTW; we've fished both open and hard water out of Zippel Bay Resort. Nick and Deanna have thirty-four years of experience on LOTW, which indicates that they are doing everything right.

Unlike the ice fishing in our part of the world, the ice fishing on LOTW lasts until the first part of April, giving anglers excellent opportunities to ice fish long after ice in our area is long gone.

We've returned year after year to the resort, because it's a first class all season resort with excellent accommodations, great help that offers excellent multi species fishing.

If you've ever had the opportunity to spend some time up north and enjoy the LOTW experience, it's an experience that every angler should experience.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the President of Outdoorsmen Productions LLC and the Producer/Host of Outdoorsmen Adventures television, which can be seen throughout the upper Midwest on Fox affiliates. For more information on the outdoors check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

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