

Bluebirds Follow Me

by
Raymond E. Muth

Valley News Dispatch 3/08/07 - Community Columnist

Tu-wheet-tudu is onomatopoeia for the sound these lovely creatures make. However when they are around me, I only hear zip-a-dee-doo-da. I believe everyone has a gift. Mine might sound a little unusual. You see, bluebirds follow me.

Now I know what you are thinking. No they do not sit on my shoulder. And this talent didn't come naturally. I guess you could say it was cultivated.

My revelation began a decade ago. It was then that Vic Rossi of Gilpin Township started speaking to me about them. A true nature lover, Vic had many terrific stories of spotting Osprey at Crooked Creek Lake or Bald Eagles up north on the Allegheny River but his very best stories were about these little bluebirds in his backyard.

I didn't pay too much attention to what he was saying at first. But Vic became more and more passionate as spring approached and he was preparing his bluebird boxes. But birds were still just birds to me back then and I listened passively.

Then one bright March day as our climate took a turn for the better, Vic pointed out a bluebird. Something started to click. I'm not sure it was love at first sight but I was getting a good vibration.

The appeal for me was not the nifty bundle of colors they displayed, although I began to appreciate their beauty. The appeal was that these birds were true underdogs. The weaklings of the bird world, I learned that they had been displaced from our environment to a great degree by the incidental importation of non-indigenous sparrows and starlings that hitched a ride on board the immigrant ships from Europe in the 1800s.

So I put up my first bluebird box at the end of February, 8 years ago. Within a week I had somehow attracted a curious male bluebird that just looked about for a few minutes. By the end of March, a female joined the male and began building their signature tightly woven nest. But then a few days later, a sparrow had chased them out and built its own sloppy nest. I did what others had suggested and I removed the sparrow nest out. I did this day after day after day until one day the sparrow quit trying to build his nest and he moved along. Soon the bluebirds reestablished their nest all over again.

A couple weeks later, 5 blue eggs appeared. I was pretty surprised how great this was going. But then one terrible day, unknown to me, the sworn enemy of the nesting bluebird arrived – the wretched wren. I peeped into my bluebird box on the first day of May hoping to find some hatchlings and I was shocked by what I saw. A wren had not only speared holes through all the bluebird eggs but it had pecked my male bluebird to death.

This was now a mission. I brought out a slingshot I hadn't used since I was a kid and while I never could hit the broad side of a barn with that thing, I could do enough to scare those wretched wrens away whenever they reappeared. I spent the rest of the summer chasing wrens away and hoping for bluebirds. But I never attracted another nesting pair.

But for the next seven years as the sworn defender of bluebirds, I not only attracted a nesting pair but had 3 broods of 4-5 baby bluebirds per year. If you have young children, this is great fun. We fledged almost 100 bluebirds in those years and they rewarded our diligence by dicing up insects on our deck each morning only a few feet from where we had our own breakfast. Yum.

The hardest part about moving last summer was saying good-bye to my flock. But I noticed a few blues on my fence this morning and I know they followed me to Jefferson Township. It's time to reestablish my flock with a new set of bluebird boxes.

If you enjoy your backyard, consider putting up a bluebird box. Facing it south works best for me. They say happiness is a bird box full of baby bluebirds. You just might find yourself singing zip-a-dee-doo-da too.



[E-Mail Ray](#)

[Home](#) | [About Me](#) | [Family](#) | [Critters](#) | [Work](#) | [Articles](#) | [Archives](#)