



# CHIPS & PUTTS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE  
POCONO TURFGRASS ASSOCIATION

Founded in  
1936

VOL. 7, NO. 8

December 2001

## THE EASTERN BLUEBIRD

The Eastern Bluebird is a favorite migratory songbird of birders and non-birders alike. The bird's bright blue color and melodious song make it a welcome visitor. The history of the bluebird spans a series of struggles and successes and only recently, through active wildlife management, has its future been considered secure. During the days of frontier settlement, the bluebird was among the wildlife species that benefited from the decimation of the eastern forests. The conversion of forest into pasture, orchards, and home sites created an abundance of ideal bluebird habitat – open areas that supported the nesting and foraging activities of the species. Farmers unintentionally assisted bluebirds by bordering their fields with wooden fence posts; thus supplying additional nesting sites. Combined, these factors led to a proliferation of bluebird numbers throughout the eastern United States through the mid-1800s. However, this situation changed in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of the European starling and the English house sparrow. In the twentieth century, metal replacement of wooden fence posts, increased cropland acreage, and a growing human population also contributed to bluebird population reductions. Fortunately, the favored status of the bluebird and its acceptance of artificial nesting structures has led to increased efforts to boost its populations to sustainable levels.

Ideal eastern bluebird habitat consists of scattered hardwoods and grasslands in a rural setting. Frequently used grassy areas include meadows, pastures, yards, roadsides, power line rights-of-way, and farmland. Mowed areas such as golf courses, large lawns, and grazed areas provide suitable habitat as well. Open areas provide foraging habitat, and nearby trees serve as perching or possible nesting sites. Although eastern bluebird populations are on the rise, the largest threat to their future is the continued loss of nesting habitat.

Approximately two-thirds of the diet of an adult bluebird consists of insects and other



invertebrates. The remainder of the bird's diet is made up of wild fruits. Favored insect foods include grasshoppers, crickets, katydids, and beetles. Other food items include earthworms, spiders, millipedes, centipedes, sow bugs, and snails. Fruits are especially important when insects are scarce in the winter months. Some preferred winter food sources include dogwood, hawthorn, wild grape, and sumac and hackberry seeds. Supplemental fruits eaten include blackberries, bayberries, fruit of honeysuckle, Virginia creeper, red cedar, and pokeberries. Bluebirds feed by perching on a high point, such as a branch or fence post, and swooping down to catch insects on or near the ground. The availability of a winter food source will often determine whether or not a bird will migrate. If bluebirds do remain in region for the winter, they will group and seek cover in heavy thickets, orchards, or other areas in which adequate food and cover resources are available.

The eastern bluebird is a cavity-nesting species, but does not have the ability to create its own nesting cavity. It must rely on the abandoned cavities of woodpeckers or find other natural cavities such as open tops of rotted-out stumps or wooden fence posts. Nesting boxes are also readily accepted for nesting. Nesting pairs typically select cavities 3 to 20 feet above ground in areas where open space provides an insect base on which to forage. The role of the nesting cavity remains important

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- Update from Golf Chairman
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## President's Message.....

Is it that time already?

Is Christmas here already? It seems like just yesterday I was opening all my presents from the many PTGA members for being their fearless leader. I promise I'm not going to complain about anything in this message.

As many of you know, Darrin Bafisky is moving on to greener fairways. From the PTGA and myself, Good Luck, Darrin. We're going to miss you. I hope you don't have as much clover at your new place! So now let's guess what this means. Correct! We need another board member. If you are interested, please feel free to contact me at 201-262-3365.

During this holiday season, let's take a moment to remember all the victims and families that were involved in the tragedy on 9/11/01.

A "Thank You" goes out to everyone involved in making my 2001 with the PTGA a great one.

*Gene Huelster*

P.S. If you're looking for my sizes, I am an XL in shirts!

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## From the Editor's Desk.....

I would like to invite all members to consider contributing any news or photographs of personal interest that may be of interest to your fellow members of the PTGA. Here's your chance to immortalize yourself with a picture of that trophy 4-point you got this fall, or a chance for some of you to silence your critics with an action photo of you working at the course. We can scan your photo at the printer, or we can download a digital photo. All forms are acceptable.

Also, guest columnists are always welcome at *Chips & Putts*. If you have an interesting project you would like to enlighten us about, or you've gone cutting edge again and would like to share your trade secrets for our benefit, consider yourself always welcome. I am hoping to add a little personality to this newsletter, and I am hoping for your assistance in achieving that.

Here's hoping all of you have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

*Eric Reed*



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570-655-2383  
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PTGA Office  
RR 1, Box 219  
Harding, PA 19643  
Phone/Fax: (570) 388-2167



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throughout nestling development, as young remain in the nest dependent upon parent bluebirds until fledging roughly 15 to 18 days after hatching.

Before nesting boxes are erected, a maintenance, monitoring, and data collection plan should be developed to ensure program success. Unmonitored boxes may be counter-productive by helping to increase populations of exotic competitor species such as house sparrow. It is essential to erect only as many boxes as can be realistically monitored. Boxes should be monitored once a week during the breeding season (March-July). However, monitors should avoid disturbing boxes during cold, rainy, or other inclement weather that may harm nesting birds or eggs. Approach nest boxes from an angle and make a slight noise to flush the female from the nest. Once the female exits, the box can be opened and its contents recorded. Boxes should not be opened after the twelfth day following hatching to help prevent young from prematurely leaving the nest. Since bluebird pairs often raise more than one clutch per season, old nests should be removed from boxes after each clutch fledges. Clean nesting materials may be beneficial to wildlife utilizing the boxes in the winter and can be left in boxes at seasons end. Boxes should be cleaned of all nesting materials in the spring, before the start of nesting season. Being aware of what species is using the box is also beneficial. Bluebird societies would like you to monitor and report all species using your nest boxes, not just bluebirds. Species such as bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and chickadees are all native and beneficial birds. How to identify nests and eggs by species:

**Bluebird:** The 1-4 inch tall nest is built with fine grasses or pine needles with a fairly deep nest cup. Eggs (4-6) are powder blue or occasionally white.

**Tree swallow:** Their nest is also made of grasses but they may use somewhat coarser fibers than a bluebird. The nest generally has a flatter cup than the bluebird's and is usually lined with feathers or occasionally scraps of paper. Eggs (5-7) are white and smaller than those of the bluebird.

**House Wren:** Wrens fill a nest box with sticks and the line the deep nest cup with fine plant fibers or feathers. "Dummy nests" without the nest cup are often built in all other cavities within the male wren's territory to reduce competition for resources. The eggs (6-8) are tan, speckled with brown and quite small.

**Black-capped chickadee:** Chickadees build a nest of moss and plant down with the nest cup lined with hair. They lay 5-8 white eggs covered with brown speckles. Eggs are often covered with moss when the female leaves the box.

**House sparrow:** House sparrows build a tall nest of coarse grasses, often with pieces of scrap paper, cellophane, or other garbage. The nest forms a canopy with a tunnel-like entrance to the 5-7 cream-colored eggs with brown markings.

Place bluebird boxes in open grassy areas that are accompanied by widely scattered trees and shrubs. Open areas are preferred, as placement of boxes in or near areas thick with brush and woody vegetation likely will result in habitation of many boxes by house wrens. Boxes should be placed at least 100 yards apart to accommodate individual territories established by nesting pairs during the breeding season. Boxes should be placed well away from buildings because of the high concentration of house sparrows generally found near human habitations. Research has shown that placing boxes low to the ground, at 4 to 5 feet, may help deter sparrows from inhabiting them. Boxes should face away from the prevailing winds and rain

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and be placed in location that will enable the box to receive a fair amount of sunlight. Ideally a tree or shrub should be located 25 to 100 feet away in front of a box entrance. This will provide a perch for foraging adults and fledglings will use this cover on their first flight out of the box.

More information can be found online at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) or by writing the NABS:  
The North American Bluebird Society  
PO Box 74  
Darlington, WI 53530-0074

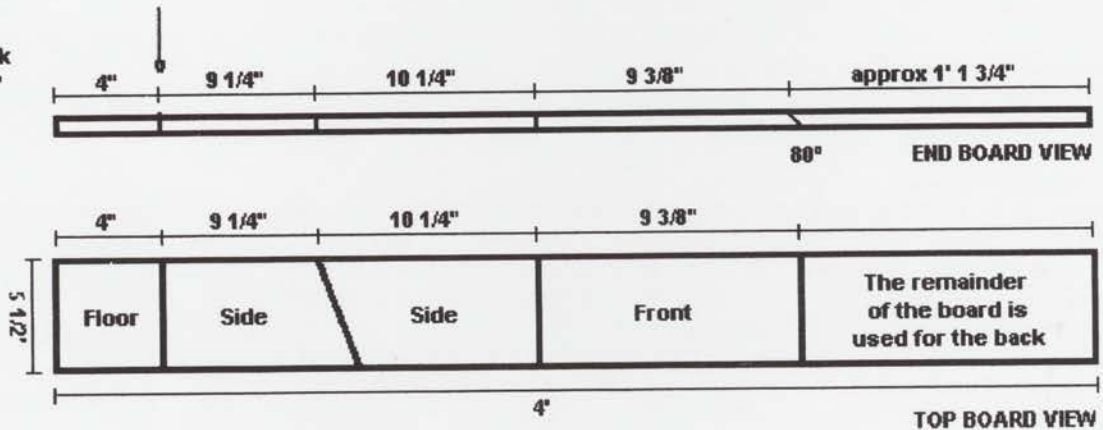
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Eastern Bluebird (*sialia sialis*), Northern Prairie Wildlife

## Seminar at Woodloch Springs

An Environmentally Sustainable Golf Course Management Seminar will be held at Woodloch Springs in Hawley on February 27, 2002. This seminar is geared toward golf course superintendents and managers in the northeastern Pennsylvania area. Speakers will include Joellen Zeh from Audubon International, Dr. Frank Browne, P.E. from F. X. Browne, Inc., David Bishop from GCSAA, and a panel of superintendents from Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary-certified golf courses to discuss the ups and downs of the certification process. GCSAA-certified superintendents should be able to receive 0.8 PDUs for attending. If you are interested and would like to receive a registration form, please contact Rebecca L. Buerkett, Project Scientist, 518-891-1410 or e-mail her at [rbuerkett@fxbrowne.com](mailto:rbuerkett@fxbrowne.com).

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## Update from the Golf Chairman



The New Year is almost upon us and while you may be thinking of shoveling snow, I have been given the responsibility of thinking golf.

During my years on the Board of Directors, I heard many unfair complaints about our monthly meetings. I always dismissed it as lack of knowledge, not only of the parameters we use to set up the meetings, but also the amount of effort it takes to put these meetings together. I also heard a lot of constructive criticism, which I intend to put to good use. So in an attempt to minimize further frustration, I am going to lay it all out there for you to see.

In order to keep costs down, we try to find hosts that comp us the green fee and only charge us for a cart. This amount is usually between \$15 and \$20. Depending on the format, we usually try to collect \$10 for golf prizes. An additional \$5 is necessary for incidentals, which may include speaker costs (travel, golf, and other expenses), tips and gratuities, and expenses for the host superintendent. This amount can vary depending on the meeting, but will average out for the season. We try to keep the cost of dinner at \$20 to \$25 and find sponsors for lunch (if applicable)

Given those parameters, you can see how meeting expenses can easily reach \$55 or more. That is, of course, if we can find enough sites. Sometimes, we have to increase those amounts to find a facility in a given month.

So I asked myself, what could we do to improve monthly meetings? Well first of all, we can look at ourselves. The PTGA has around 70 golf course members. At 8 meetings per year, you would only have to have meeting once every 9 years with the given parameters. Not a lot to ask in my opinion. Don't worry; I didn't forget the commercial guys. The association has about 32 represented companies as members. At 8 meetings per year, each company would only have to host one lunch every 4 years to keep costs down.

Next, we need to look at what our committee can do. This year, we will make an effort to have more lunch meetings and possibly a cocktail hour afterward. In order to encourage more sponsors and a greater number of superintendents to attend, we are making the following changes. If a company sponsors lunch or a cocktail hour, AFFILIATE members will not see a reduction in cost. All other members will see a reduction in cost for that meeting. As an affiliate myself, I understand the difficulty in explaining to your boss how you just bought lunch or cocktails for 20 of your fellow salespeople. Remember, we are not increasing the costs for the affiliate members; we are just applying sponsor money to the other classifications. In addition, each month, we will publish the names of those sponsors as they sign up and announce sponsors at the meetings.

In addition, I will be experimenting with golf formats that are more fun. If you take your golf more seriously than that, perhaps you should look into the PGA School.

In order to make the meetings fun, I will rely heavily on handicaps. Because we only have eight events per year, I can't possibly keep a handicap for you. So if you have one, great. If you don't, tell me what you realistically can shoot and I will make one up for you. Keep in mind, I reserve the right to penalize, harass, and /or ridicule those whose handicaps are, shall we say, off kilter.

SO LET'S GET STARTED. Anyone interested in HOSTING a meeting or SPONSORING lunch or cocktails, please let me know. I can be reached at 610-866-6305, or better yet, aquatg@ptd.net.

Just a few more details you may need. The average attendance is around 40 people, so plan a shotgun accordingly, sometime around noon. Expect a field of over 100 people if you are interested in hosting the clambake. Lunch or cocktail sponsorships will be \$200 per event (clambake \$400). We must have a set amount even though costs will vary from one event to another, in order to determine fee structure ahead of time. That cost can be billed through our office in one or several payments.

I have received expressed interest in hosting a meeting through the grapevine, but would everyone interested in hosting a meeting for the upcoming 2002 season, please contact me personally so that we can begin the detail work.

Thanks,  
Tony Grieco, CGCS

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### Upcoming Events

January 8-10  
Eastern PA Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show  
610-378-1327

January 13-17  
Golf Course Management Seminar  
800-624-6988, #4019

January 15-16  
2002 Midwest Turf EXPO  
765-494-8039

January 15-17  
Maine Turfgrass Conference & Show  
207-781-7878

January 21  
GCSAA Seminar-Management of localized dryspots.  
800-472-7878

January 21  
GCSAA Seminar-Understanding bio-stimulants  
800-472-7878

January 21-24  
Michigan Turfgrass Conference  
517-321-1660



## Research Update: Be Sure to Take Your Calcium

So-called bio-stimulants have gained increasing attention in recent years for their apparent ability to increase turf's resistance to stresses, including drought stress. One effect of drought stress is an increase in oxidation inside plant tissue. It's thought that plants resist the destructive effects of oxidation with naturally occurring antioxidants. Bio-stimulants may help boost their activity, thereby protecting plants.

Bio-stimulants typically consist of mixtures of complex organic compounds, but there may be a simpler alternative. Researchers Yiwei Jiang of Kansas State University and Bingru Huang of Rutgers University studied the effects of calcium on drought-stressed plants and found that calcium provided protective effects that may relate to antioxidant activity.

Using tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, the researchers treated (with foliar spray) some plants with calcium chloride and others with plain water. The plants were then subjected to drought stress and compared to others that were supplied with ample water throughout the study.

Consistently, the calcium-treated plants showed greater tolerance to drought than plants that only received the foliar water spray, as manifested by better overall quality, higher tissue water content and higher chlorophyll content.

A potential explanation for this might be that calcium directly affects osmotic (water) potential inside leaf tissue. However, the investigators looked at this and found no such effects. Rather, they found that it was increases in antioxidant activity that protected the plants against drought. One specific result of this was a more intact cell membrane, which enables the plant cells to retain tissue water more effectively.

Could calcium sprays become a practical method of protecting against drought? The potential seems to exist.

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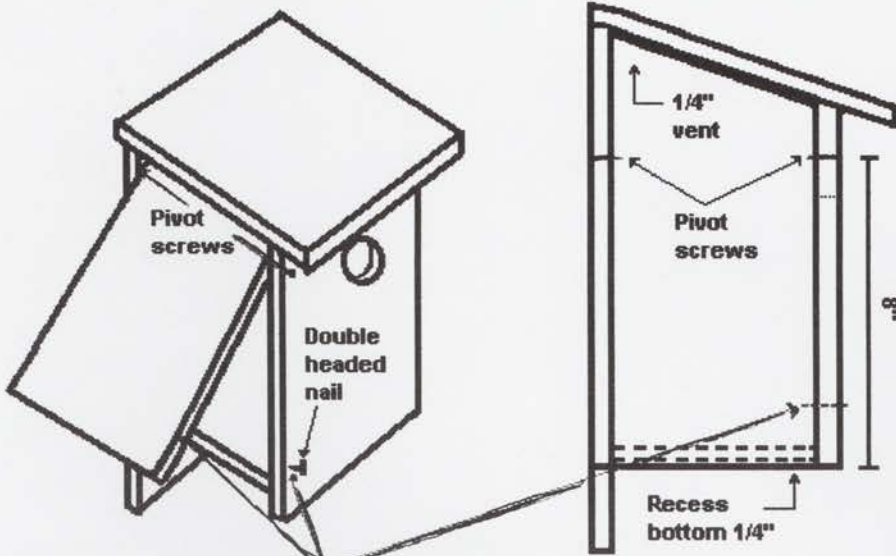
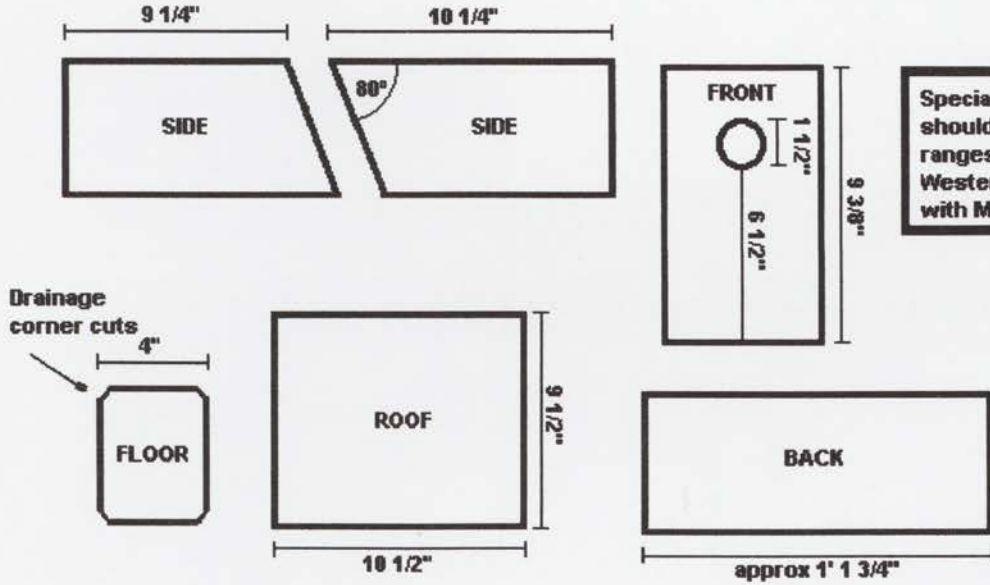


*A message from your golf course superintendent and GCSAA*



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Drill hole through "front" and side of door to hold door closed with nail



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