



# Bluebird Monitor

OBS encourages good stewardship  
by **Monitoring** our Trails

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## The Return of the Bluebird

By Barbara Baudot



In writing this article, I thought of the first time I met the renowned Bluebird Lady living in my neighborhood in Massachusetts — Lillian Lund Files. The year was 1986 and she was President of the North American Bluebird Society.

Lillian was unforgettable. She had bluebirds on her 30-acre property in Tyngsboro, MA for more than 55 years. In 1942, when bluebirds were a rarity in New England, Lillian reported that birders flocked to her place every spring to view these winged beauties and witness their careful attention to their young.

In 1986, she showed me the more than one hundred bluebird nesting boxes on her property. Not only did she educate me about bluebirds but she encouraged me to get engaged in working to help these birds reproduce and survive. Today she is credited in large measure for bringing bluebirds back to New England after their near extinction.

Lillian introduced me to actual bluebirds when hitherto my only knowledge had come from acquaintance with the charming Mr. Bluebird in Disney's *Song of the South*. Lillian understood as now I firmly believe that to protect bluebirds it is necessary to appeal to the emotions of the general populace as well as to ornithologists and birders. There is a lot of knowledge about the life and benefits of bluebirds. Much is known about their struggles to survive in a disenchanting world over-populated with European sparrows and starlings, over-exploited by industrial agricultural expansion, and polluted by pesticides. Science informs bluebird enthusiasts about building bluebird trails and keeping them up in protected natural habitats. But touching the hearts of people requires reviving the symbolism long associated with bluebirds.

Lillian gave me Andre Dion's book, *The Return of the Bluebird*. A fairytale written in free verse it offers heart-rending glimpses of hardships endured by bluebirds in Quebec. In this story the bluebird overcomes many tribulations and a lonely winter

sheltered but shivering in an empty box. The final line of this poem exclaims: "How beautiful they will be, the springs of yesteryear at last returned — springs made sparkling by the celestial warbling of blue-coated troubadours." Such poignant fairytales move readers to sympathize with their bluebird heroes.

The bluebird is best known in literature and song as the symbol of happiness. But it is also of hope when human life is in grave danger. In 1918, during the Russian civil war, General Kornilov of the Voluntary Army led his forces deep into the frozen steppe. "We went," General Anton Denikin recalled: "from the dark night and spiritual slavery to unknown wandering — in search of the bluebird." This "Ice March" lasted from February to mid-May 1918. Sadly Kornilov was killed, but Denikin's Voluntary Army grew to 100,000 and almost destroyed the Revolution. See E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 21-22.

Photo By Barbara Baudot



Henry David Thoreau also features the bluebird as a purveyor of hope in bleak winter months: "I no sooner step out of the house than I hear the bluebirds in the air, and far and near, throughout the town you may hear them, ... harbingers of serene and warm weather, little azure rills of melody trickling here and there from out of

the air, their short warble trilled in the air reminding of so many corkscrews assaulting and thawing the torpid mass of winter, assisting the ice and snow to melt and the streams to flow."

At this moment of our history and during this gray winter season we need more than ever the bluebird's imagery of Celestial Truth, happiness and hope.