

See You Out There ... But Where?



Do you know where this
Nebraska photograph
was taken?
See answer at the bottom
of page 13.

Bluebirds of Nebraska

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Although Nebraska is on the western edge of the eastern bluebird's (*Sialia sialis*) range, sightings are becoming more common where nesting boxes have been introduced. Like its larger cousin, the robin, the male eastern bluebird has an orange breast and white belly, but is known for its strikingly sky blue head, back and tail. The female's coloring is less remarkable, with fainter grey-blue tail and wings. Bluebirds are not city dwellers, preferring rural areas of open fields with short-grass prairie or mowed areas where they can easily feed on insects on the ground.

Populations were on the decline due to nesting problems, losing much of their habitat to housing and industrial development. Also, Bluebirds like to nest in pre-existing tree cavities or rotting fence posts, which have been replaced with metal posts. But with the introduction of new nesting locations, the species is making a comeback. Over 200 monitored next boxes can

now be found at Nine-Mile Prairie as well as several Nebraska State Parks including Ponca, Platte River, Mahoney, Schramm, Niobrara, and Ashfall State Parks.

Bluebird nesting boxes are often targeted by house sparrows, so placing a Bluebird nesting box outside of urban areas by sheds or barns will bring the most success. A bluebird box should never have a perch, as perches attract sparrows and wrens. Avoid mounting Bluebird boxes on trees or fence posts to avoid predators, although they need a fence line or tree branches fairly close to their nests to perch on while searching for food. The entrance hole should be about five feet off the ground.

If bluebirds are not common in your area, it may take a season or two for Bluebirds to find your box, but once they find a good nesting area, they generally return year after year.

