

May 4, 2008

BLUEBIRD BLUES by Les Daniels

The past 2 to 3 weeks have been the worst Bluebird experience that we are aware of in the 20+ years of the Hot Springs Village Bluebird program. About 25 of the 300 boxes that we monitor on 9 golf courses had dead bluebird babies in them, over 100 dead babies in all. In addition several nests had abandoned eggs in them. Most of the babies were almost ready to fledge; none of them showed signs of a predator. The deaths were found on all 9 of our courses.

A change in golf course chemical usage was the first thing suspected. This was ruled out when the maintenance men all reported no change from previous years. All courses use the same chemicals. No insecticides have been used this spring, only fungicides and herbicides.

At this time we believe the problem was weather related. All the deaths appeared to occur about the same time. Although we did not have a hard freeze during that time, we did have 1 or 2 very severe, cold thunderstorms with strong winds. A number of large pine trees were blown over during the storms. We assume that a large number of adult bluebirds may have been killed. Although the babies were probably not injured by the storms, starvation may have resulted.

We will continue to research other possible causes for this problem and whether we can do anything to prevent it from occurring again. Please E-mail Les Daniels (lesdan@ipa.net) if you had any similar experiences, any other ideas on what caused these deaths, or comments on preventative measures that we should consider.