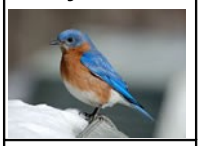
Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District

480 North Main Street
Canandaigua NY 14424
585-396-1450
ontswcd@rochester.rr.com
www.ontswcd.com

February 2011

Page 2

Bluebird Nest Boxes, a Success Story



Page 3

Ontario County Equine Survey Completed

2011 Tree and Shrub Program

Order Trees and Shrubs Now

The Ontario County SWCD 2011 Annual Tree and Shrub Program is underway. Residents and businesses interested in conservation plantings will be pleased with the healthy, economical offerings.

Native trees and shrubs are a feature of the Tree and Shrub program. The advantages of native plantings are many. The plants are:

- well adapted to local climate and soils
- well adapted to resist local insects and diseases
- a source of food, shelter and resources for native birds and beneficial animals
- a means of windbreak protection
- a means of controlling soil erosion and stabilizing steep slopes
- beautiful additions to homes and grounds

Evergreens, deciduous trees, deciduous shrubs and rooted ground covers are available in quantities of at least 10 (or multiples of 10) of the same species.

Packets of selected plants are also available. These contain five different species:

- Evergreen Packets
- Homeowners Packets
- Fast Growing Packets
- Native Flowering Packets
- Songbird Packets

Bluebird Nest Boxes made by skilled students at Finger Lakes Technical and Career Center Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES are a specialty of the Tree and Shrub sale. These are designed and constructed to the best specifications for successful brood hatches.

Fertilizer tablets are available to help new plantings get off to a fast start.

Fluorescent marking flags are available to help avoid those terrible incidents with mowers after the trees and shrubs have been planted.

More details are available on the order form and on our website: **www.ontswcd.com.**

Black Cherry Tree Blooming

Forms available from our website: www.ontswcd.com
Tree and Shrub Sale
Fish Stocking Order
DEC Farm Fish Pond License Application
AEM Tier I Survey
Request for Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Inspection

Bluebird Nest Boxes:
A Conservation Success Story

Eastern Bluebirds have a long and interesting history in New York. Once plentiful, bluebirds were seriously threatened by human activities including extensive tree cutting, pesticide use, introduction of invasive bird species (e.g. house sparrows), urbanization and the increased popularity of pet cats.

Bluebird populations reached such a low point in the 1960s that when Governor Nelson Rockefeller designated it the state bird in 1970, one delegate objected, stating, "*I think this is a bit premature. After all, who has ever seen a bluebird, except perhaps on the cover of a greeting card?"*

Eastern Bluebirds have been rescued primarily through the efforts of individual citizens and private groups committed to conservation. Nest boxes have been the key. Woodpecker holes in dead trees are the natural nest sites for bluebirds. Nest boxes mimic those conditions.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology studies suggest that snug nest boxes 4 inches square on the bottom with an entrance hole of 1.5-1.4 inch diameter are best. The box must be in place before the nesting season begins in early March. The box should be hinged to allow easy clean out of nest materials between broods to prevent build up of harmful parasites. Old nests should be disposed of away from the box as they will attract predators.

Ideal placement of a nest box would be with the opening away from the sun and prevailing winds, near a meadow, with a fence or bush nearby for perching.

The nest box should be mounted on a pole or tree three to five feet above the ground to discourage predators. Nest boxes on smooth poles are more secure than tree-mounted boxes. Boxes placed along roads should open parallel to the road so birds (especially fledglings) are less likely to enter traffic. Nest boxes should not be spaced closer than 300 feet as the birds are territorial.

Males attract females to the nest by carrying bits of nesting material into and out of the box. The pair bond is established when the female enters the nest hole with him. The pair usually remains intact for several seasons. Eggs are laid one each day until the clutch is complete. Incubation lasts 13-14 days. Chicks remain in the nest 17-18 days after hatching.

Monitor the nest on calm, mild days. Songbirds have a poor sense of smell and will not abandon a nest because of handling of nest, eggs or chicks. Check for and remove parasites such as blowfly larvae. Monitoring the nest should be limited to viewing from a distance after the 13th day or the chicks might leave the box prematurely.

Few things are more rewarding than seeing a nest of bluebirds fledge. Watching those small birds that seem like bits of blue sky bobbing about in the air is intensely entertaining and satisfying.

The nest boxes offered by Ontario County SWCD (order forms in this newsletter) are specifically designed to enhance nesting success.

Tree swallows also use these nest boxes and will nest close to a pair of bluebirds (although they will not nest closer to other tree swallows as swallows are also territorial). By placing two boxes 10 to 20 feet apart, you can provide a home for both bluebirds and tree swallows, lessening competition between these birds.

To set up a bluebird trail and tree swallow trail, place two boxes within 20 feet of each other, separated from other boxes by at least 300 feet.

Photograph by Tad Gerace: Bluebird Nest Box with nest containing 4 eggs, opened to monitor activities.

Located at the Ontario County fairgrounds, infield of speedway: this box is one of those donated by SWCD as thanks for use of the grounds for the Tree and Shrub Program. Box is monitored and maintained by Tad Gerace, SWCD Technician.

Waterfowl = Foul Water ?
Don't Feed Waterfowl

Are more Canada geese and other waterfowl overwintering in the Finger Lakes area? The current answer to that question is: "We don't know yet." DEC waterfowl experts estimate goose numbers based on data from several sources. The Christmas Bird Count, the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Count and records of harvest are used to infer general trends.

Estimating populations of any kind of wildlife is extremely difficult as they move from place to place so easily. Official reports will be published later in the year.

What we *do* know is that geese and other waterfowl deposit feces in the water as they are swimming, sitting on the ice, and particularly when they "lighten the load" to fly off the water. The inevitable result is bacterial and nutrient (nitrogen and phosphorus) loading of the water. Feces deposited on the near-shore areas quickly wash into the water as well.

Phosphorus is the nutrient in least supply in the waters of the Finger Lakes, therefore adding phosphorus causes an immediate response in plant growth. *One pound of phosphorus supports the growth of 500 pounds of waterweeds.*

Feeding waterfowl during the winter is an extremely bad practice. It not only contributes to subsequent algae and aquatic plant growth, it harms the birds by concentrating them in small areas, allowing diseases to spread easily. Unnatural diets often cause wing deformity in goslings and ducklings, making them unable to fly. Geese lose their fear of humans and become aggressive during the nesting season.

Be kind to your waterbody and to the waterfowl. Don't feed waterfowl.

Equine Census of Ontario County Conducted

SWCD Water Resources Technician Bill Hershey has recently completed a census of the equine (horse, donkey, mule) population of Ontario County.

The goal of the census was to determine numbers, distribution and population densities of equines within the county. This is preliminary information and will be further analyzed to determine appropriate focus for potential SWCD assistance.

Although primarily used for recreation and kept in fewer numbers than cattle, horses can exert similar environmental impacts. Manure management, grazing intensity (soil erosion results from overgrazed pastures), types of forages planted, pasture fertilization practices and proximity of the animals and their waste to streams or wetlands are all issues of concern.

Town	Equine Population	Number of Land Owners With Equines	Avg # of Equines per Landowner
Bistol	141	44	3.2
Canadice	34	11	3
Canandaigua	189	52	3.6
East Bloomfield	172	54	3.1
Farmington ***	221	40	5.5
Geneva	25	8	3.1
Gorham	121	47	2.5
Hopewell	88	30	2.9
Manchester	89	28	3.1
Naples	47	17	2.7
Phelps	163	62	2.6
Richmond	113	30	3.7
Seneca	67	22	3
South Bristol	35	17	2
Victor	139	36	3.8
West Bloomfield	114	38	3

****These numbers do not include the nearly 1200 horses associated with Finger Lakes Race Track.*

These concerns can be addressed by planning and implementing practices including grazing and paddock management plans, proper composting of wastes and control of runoff and roofwater to keep clean water clean. Free technical assistance for these and other practices is available to equine farmers through Ontario County SWCD's Agricultural Environmental Management program.

Ontario County SWCD Staff Directory

Senior District Manager:
- Patrick J. Emerick – CPESC,CPSWQ,CMS4S
  - Administration
  - Soil Erosion Control
  - Streambank Stabilization
  - Water Resources Council

Field Manager
- Robert Stryker - CPESC
  - NYS Certified CAFO Planner
  - Municipal Highway Assistance
  - Drainage & Conservation Practices

District Clerk/Treasurer/Secretary
- Elaine Borgeest
  - Fish Stocking Program

Conservation Educator
- Edith Davey
  - Education & Training Programs
  - Website & Newsletter

Conservation District Technician
- Tad Gerace
  - Onsite Wastewater Systems
  - Tree and Shrub Sale

Water Resources Technician
- Bill Hershey
  - Ag Environmental Management
  - Drainage & Farm Assistance

Canandaigua Lake Watershed Inspector
- George Barden - CPESC
  - Onsite Wastewater Systems
- Jamie Noga
  - Administrative Assistant
- Kerry Haefele
  - Assistant to Watershed Inspector.

Farmers interested in completing an AEM assessment are encouraged to **call Bill Hershey at the Ontario County SWCD 585-396-1450 ext 24.** The Tier 1 form may be found on our website: www.ontswcd.com. or obtained at the District office.

AEM Agricultural Environmental Management

December 27, 2010
Ontario County SWCD celebrated its 70th anniversary of service to the county.

Providing Today, Protecting Tomorrow.

Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District
480 North Main Street
Canandaigua NY 14424