

## PROTHONOTARY WARBLERS ACCEPT BLUEBIRD BOX

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The only Warbler species in the U. S. that is a cavity nester - the Prothonotary Warbler (Protonotaria citrea) - nested in one of my Eastern Bluebird boxes this year in North Central Alabama.

Its one and only brood successfully fledged five young. It is the first time in seven years of my "Help! Bring Back the Bluebird" program that this beautiful "Swamp" Warbler has occupied one of my nest boxes. This represents hundreds of box nestings in both Illinois and Alabama. My four trails this year total 135 boxes. They are located in both Jefferson and Shelby counties nearing Birmingham, with most boxes in Oak Mountain State Park.

The Time-table recorded for the unusual nesting was as follows:

4 May 1983 Unknown non-bluebird nest found completed in Box #24 on Campgrounds' Site #101 in Oak Mt. State Park. It filled the bottom of the 4 1/2 by 4 1/2 box floor and was approximately 1 1/2 inches high. It contained mosses, grasses, and fine roots. It was cup-shaped.

17 May 1983 The bright yellow of the large warbler (5 1/4-5 1/2) was recognized as that of a Prothonotary even before the female flushed. Five cream colored, brown spotted eggs were found in the nest.

20 May 1983 Female flushed again. Five eggs were being incubated.

26 May 1983 Both male and female warblers were observed bringing food to the five small young. Photos were taken at close range from the car without undue disturbance to the parents.

1 June 1983 Nest empty. All five young now pin-feathered.

2 June 1983 Two young fledged and were being fed by parents outside of box in nearby trees. Three young remained in box also being fed. More photos were taken with long lens from car only 20 feet distance.

3 June 1983 Nest empty. All five young successfully fledged.

The nest was left intact, hoping to encourage a second brood. Further use of the nest and box by the warblers was not observed.

Bluebird Box #24 is placed on a utility pole on a campgrounds turn-around approximately 60 yards from the nearest water - a wooded and swampy back-water area of a state park fishing lake. This suitable Prothonotary Warbler habitat has had increased human use with "improvements" made to accommodate such use. This, in turn, has lessened acceptable nesting sites. The bluebird box apparently was a welcomed alternative.

With this in mind, an excerpt from the Field Guide to Birds' Nests by Hal Harrison is of interest:

"Of 84 nests (of the Prothonotary Warbler) in Southern Michigan in natural situations, 29 were over standing water, 32 were over running water, 23 over dry land, of these 43 were in natural openings, 41 in woodpecker holes."

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