

Bill Lewis works to save the earth for children

Bill Lewis is a man with a purpose, a committed naturalist who has devoted much of his life to the preservation of the things that often disappear in the wake of progress.

The 66-year-old retired lithographer, who calls Scarborough home, stopped in at two Markham area public schools earlier this week to enlist the young students into his army.

Equipped with specially made birdhouses or Bluebird boxes, Lewis and his eager band of youngsters headed out into Milne Park and the north east branch of the Don River. The nesting boxes were installed in strategic locations to maximize the chances of attracting the bird which has been diminishing in number since the mid 19th century.

Lewis is a member of the Ontario Eastern and North American Blue Bird Societies. He is also education co-ordinator with the Save the Rouge Valley System, and this week's outings were part of his mandate to arouse the interest of young people in preserving the Rouge Valley as a wildlife sanctuary.

Lewis remembers too well the deterioration of Toronto's Don River, in which he swam while growing up in East York in the 1940s. He fears the Rouge will eventually succumb to the same fate.



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

He's also aware of how man's thoughtlessness led to the near wipe out of the bluebird population in North America. This unwitting assault began with the introduction of the house sparrow to this continent from Europe in 1850. The newcomers proceeded to evict bluebird and other cavity nesting birds from their nesting sites. The sparrow became as prolific in number as the bluebird became sparse.

Then at the turn of the 19th century, the starling was

brought to North America from Europe, contributing even further to the decline of the bluebird.

Lewis' own interest in bringing back the bluebirds began at his family's cottage on Balsam Lake

some 35 years ago.

Through the years, he has set up and monitored 50 bluebird boxes along a nearby Kawartha's nature trail. Lately, he has been accompanied on his cottage country crusades by his

granddaughter, who Lewis hopes will continue to carry the flag when he is no longer able.

Over the past four years, Lewis has distributed 14 bluebird boxes along a small trail in

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