

Building Bluebird Houses for Ball's Falls Conservation Area

by David Brown

Nestled on the scenic Niagara Escarpment, only steps away from the quaint hamlet of Jordan, Ball's Falls Conservation Area has always been a perfect spot for an outdoor adventure with waterfalls, historical buildings, hiking trails and interactive exhibits. The park showcases the incredibly breathtaking view of the majestic Twenty Mile Creek as it plummets over both the upper and lower falls. Since the Twenty Mile Creek is rain fed, the character of the falls can change dramatically with the seasons, from a raging torrent in the spring to a thin veil in late summer and fall. The 200-acre park includes a Centre for Conservation, designed to have a limited impact on the surrounding environment, featuring permanent and temporary galleries, exhibits and interactive displays, including the conservation practices of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), archaeological findings, and the watershed ecosystem of Twenty Mile Creek. Still standing within the park are the original Ball family home, an operating gristmill, a lime kiln, a restored church, a blacksmith shop, and a carriage shed.

Thousands of plant and animal species grow throughout the Ball's Falls Conservation Area. The list of plant species totals 471 and includes such plants as Wild Sarsaparilla, Wild Ginger, Virginia Bluebells, Canada Yew, Wild Leek, Wild Asparagus, Wild Yam, Red Mulberry, Canada Anemone, Chokecherry, and St. John's Wort. Ball's Falls is made up of



▲ Behind the bluebird houses project, from left, Doug Ransom, Heber Crewe, and Bob Dobrenski. PHOTO BY GRAHAM BROWN.

hardwoods mixed with coniferous trees, lying within the deciduous forest zone. Tree species include Eastern Cottonwood, Butternut, Black Walnut, Shagbark Hickory, Tulip Tree and Slippery Elm. Rare species include Sycamore, Sassafras and Pignut Hickory. Among the species of birds found at Ball's Falls are the Eastern Bluebird, Indigo Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Mallards, and Killdeer.

Peterson Bluebird Houses

Over the years, former education administrator, Doug Ransom has been an NPCA board member and former chairman, actively engaged

in conservation efforts and working in various capacities for the interests of Ball's Falls. This year Doug has channelled his wood crafting talents towards the development of bird houses for Ball's Falls. This project has also been taken up by former quality analyst and pattern maker Bob Dobrenski and former Hydro superintendent Heber Crewe, instrumental in interpreting blueprints and specifications as well as designing jigs, operating machine tools and identifying production problems.

The objective of the project was to construct 15 Peterson bluebird houses which will all be used in open areas within





▲ From left, Heber Crewe, Doug Ransom, Bob Dobrenski. PHOTO BY GRAHAM BROWN.



▲ Peterson bluebird houses ready for installation. PHOTO BY DOUG RANSOM.

the Balls' Falls park. A Peterson bluebird house is a wedge-shaped box, featuring a large steep roof to provide protection from the summer sun and to make predation by raccoons and cats more difficult. The sloping front reduces rain entering the box while the framing provides insulation, moderating temperature extremes within the box. Proponents of the Peterson box feel that an oval hole shape allows the adults to feed the young and remove the fecal sacs. Peterson boxes are somewhat more complicated to build than conventional nest boxes due to the 45° and 27° angles within the box.

Ball's Falls is a pearl suspended on the

string of the Niagara Escarpment. With its rich natural landscape, many trails and lovely waterfalls, Ball's Falls Conservation Area in Lincoln is popular with humans, plants, and animals. It is nice to think that areas like Ball's Falls continue to conserve and celebrate nature and the wildlife that play a vital role in our ecosystem. If you get a chance, you should definitely try to visit Ball's Falls. You might even find some Eastern Bluebirds happily nesting in a Peterson bluebird house.

David Brown is a long-time resident of Niagara Region with a very strong interest in community service.



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