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## Hybrid Bluebirds in the Pine Ridge


Barbara L. Wilson  
*Hastings, Nebraska*

Jim Minyard  
*Crawford, Nebraska*

Hope Minyard  
*Crawford, Nebraska*

Tanya Bray  
*Omaha, Nebraska*

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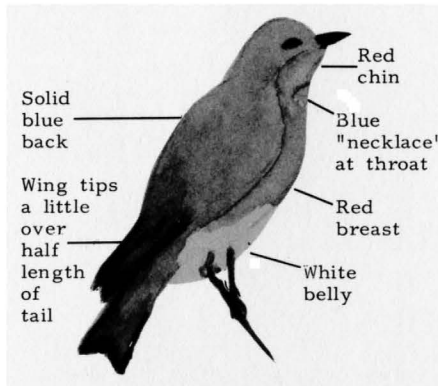
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HYBRID BLUEBIRDS IN THE PINE RIDGE

A hybrid pair of bluebirds is raising young in Dawes Co., Nebraska, in the yard of Jim and Hope Minyard, approximately 8 miles south of Crawford.

The female of the pair is a Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*). She is basically a dull gray bluebird, with little contrast between upperparts and underparts. There is no rusty or tan on her breast, and no sharp demarcation between the gray breast and the lighter belly. Her rump and the bases of her outer tail feathers are a light, bright blue, while the other tail feathers and the primaries are blackish. When the wing is folded, her longest wing feathers approach, but do not reach, the tip of her tail.



The male presents a more complicated picture. Superficially he resembles an Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) because the upper parts are uniformly bright blue, the breast and throat are rusty, and the belly is white. The blue of his upperparts appears a lighter, more cerulean blue than is typical of Eastern Bluebirds, though it is difficult to judge without direct comparison. The rusty breast is paler and duller than usual for male Easterns, as well. Most peculiarly, there is a small, bright blue bib or necklace on the upper breast, similar in color to the back. When folded, the male's wing tips reach a little over half way down the tail. In other words, his wings are relatively shorter than those of the female. (It is too bad that Mrs. Minyard's sketch can't be shown in its full color.)

We believe that the male is a Mountain x Eastern Bluebird hybrid.

Both parents are carrying food to the nestlings, who are in a bird box about 20 feet from the Minyard home and so the birds can be observed closely.

We believe this individual male has been at this location since nesting was initiated and that he is probably the father of the young he is feeding.

Rosche (*Birds of Northwestern Nebraska and Southwestern South Dakota*. Cottonwood Press, Crawford, Nebraska, 1982) lists only one summer record of Eastern Bluebird in the Pine Ridge area of Nebraska in 10 years, but on 8 June Wilson and Bray found three apparently pure Eastern Bluebirds in addition to this male hybrid. A male sang and preened near Chadron State Park, and a pair of normal-looking Easterns foraged together in the Ponderosa Wildlife Area. Perhaps the hybridization we observe is a result of more Easterns than usual entering the Pine Ridge recently.

--- Barbara L. Wilson, Rt. 1, Box 41, Hastings, Iowa 51540  
Jim and Hope Minyard, HC 77, Box 85A1, Crawford, Nebraska 69339  
Tanya Bray, 9708 Grover, Omaha, Nebraska 68124

(Mrs. Bray noted that the last of the four young left the nest box on 23 June 1985.)