

Fifty Years Ago in *The Chat*—September 1965

“Nesting Notes from Connemara Farms”, an essay submitted by Margaret Sandburg, eldest of poet Carl Sandburg’s three daughters, was included in the Backyard Birding section. Today, Connemara Farms is part of the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic site in Flat Rock, NC. Ms. Sandburg was an active member of the Carolina Bird Club who regularly traveled to attend CBC meetings and periodically submitted reports for publication in *The Chat*.

In her essay, Ms. Sandburg provided details about the trials and tribulations she faced managing her “Bluebird Trail” at the farms. This was at a time when there was a great deal of concern about the serious decline of bluebird populations across the eastern United States. She wrote: “Cornell has certainly started me poking my nose into the private family affairs of quite a few bluebirds and wrens this year. I don’t think they minded too much, and I have certainly learned a lot while doing it.”

Ms. Sandburg noted her Bluebird Box Trail did “fairly well” that season and she provided many details of various nesting activities. Her favorite box was a rustic wooden box, shaped like a coffee pot, that she had placed near one grove of apple trees. That season the pair in that box raised two broods of young which she kept tabs on while they hatched and fledged. She watched as they practiced “flying along the pasture fence. At least, that’s what it looks like. They fly about five feet above the fence, no higher, and after managing to keep in mid-air by beating their wings fast, they drop to the ground. They do this again and again.”

Also in this issue, Rhett Chamberlain wrote a special report on the status of the Eastern Bluebirds in the Carolinas. He summarized ten years worth of Spring Bird Count and Christmas Bird Count data. The year 1960 was the low point for the population here and bluebird numbers were slowly increasing as of 1965. Chamberlain noted: “As for recovery, our recent figures point in the right direction but they scarcely go beyond that, and full recovery, if it does come, may be years off.”

Ornithologist Wendell P. Smith provided a General Field Note about his discovery of the first Willow Flycatcher (Traill’s Flycatcher) nest in North Carolina. He located the nest in “a thick cluster of privet on the edge of a swamp near the old airport at North Wilkesboro”. “The nest was a well built cup. It contained four eggs. Three of the eggs hatched on July 3.” The birds had bred at that site since 1956, but this was the first time an actual nest with eggs had been found in the state. Smith had previously collected one male and had sent it to Alexander Wetmore at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History to confirm the species identification.