



The Bird Box

Fall 2008

Hello from Danville

I finally got reports from all my monitors. Our five cemeteries have 27 boxes with 230 bluebirds, up from 106 last year! Can you believe the increase in the cemeteries in just one year? Also *nothing* nested but bluebirds in the cemeteries! I think our bluebirds and aggressive monitors are rooting out our local sparrow population. We also had one house with eight eggs and two mamas and one papa.

On the walking trail, we had 70 boxes with 250 bluebirds, four chickadees and 95 Tree Swallows fledged. We have 14 boxes at three schools and six more going up this coming week.

So far 1,855 baby blues have been reported as fledged for our city and county! We now have just over 150 boxes on public land since March 2007! That does not count the 15 in my garage waiting to go!

May all your blues be birds!

– Vickie Fuquay

Visit Our Web Site

The VBS Web site offers nest box plans, trail monitoring protocol, trail data forms, news, and links to other useful sites:

www.virginiabluebirds.org.

Take a Walk Back in Time with Me

Last week as I was going through some old files, I found a *Washington Post* article from 1997 that featured a bluebird trail that I had in Woodbridge, Virginia. It must have been a slow news week, because the article spanned three full pages with large color pictures of bluebirds. Unfortunately, the article included my phone number.

That morning my phone started ringing, and did not stop for two weeks! We logged over 500 phone calls during that time. The unfortunate part was that I had given my office phone number and my secretary was going crazy trying to handle our customers and also the calls from bluebird lovers throughout Northern Virginia. She threatened to quit a few times, but we made it through and are still good friends.

With our new-found fame, it was decided it was time to start a bluebird organization. A small group of us had been steadily working towards this goal since 1996, when we started at Pohick Regional Park with our first trail of 14 nest boxes. In 1997, we started with about 30 members and steadily grew. Today we have over 470 memberships (many memberships are for a family) throughout the state.

The other fun thing that I did was look back at some of our old data. In 1996 VBS had 40 nest boxes and fledged 108 bluebirds. By 1999 we had 1135 nest boxes reporting with 3,181 bluebirds fledging, and most of this activity was only from Northern Virginia, where we were working with golf courses and parks in the region. In 2007, we had over 4,000 nest boxes and fledged over 11,000 bluebirds. Charlie Chambers told me last week that we can expect even bigger numbers for 2008.

With hard work from our Chair of County Coordinators, Barb Chambers, we have spread throughout Virginia and now have 41 County Coordinators helping to spread our work. I just received a report from down in the Danville area from Vickie Fuquay (see left column). Vickie is a perfect example of what can be done with hard work and determination. She is an inspiration to all of us.

Mary Janet Fowler is another sparkplug down in Charlottesville. She has worked for many years with Bob Hammond. Bob had built and monitored nest boxes in the Charlottesville area for many years and has now retired. Mary Janet has taken over Bob's trail of over 330 boxes. She has organized volunteers and is starting to refurbish and install predator guards on all the boxes. A big task, but she is taking it on with relish.

The love that we all have for the bluebird is sometimes hard to explain to non-bluebird folk. Most of us were smitten the moment we saw our first bluebird, and we need that bluebird fix over and over again. I love that a new generation is coming behind us to continue and grow our efforts. I hope your dreams are filled with bluebirds throughout this long winter.

– Anne Little, VBS President, Fredericksburg

Promoting bluebirds and other cavity nesters

A Word from Julie Zickefoose

Editor's Note: Julie Zickefoose followed up her correspondence with Carol Sottilli (see story, right column) with a final e-mail:

Bluebirds are susceptible to West Nile, and bacterial enteritis is another possibility. I have lost nestlings to infectious agents every year. In wet weather it seems to be worse. Typically you get entire broods dying within a couple of days of each other. Twice last year I found surviving apparently healthy feathered nestlings sitting on the icky remains of their siblings. Even though they were near fledging, I took the risk of removing and washing the babies and cleaning out and replacing the nests. I just couldn't let those perfect little creatures sit on decaying corpses. In all cases it has worked, and they haven't fledged prematurely. And I've slept better afterward.

[Carol's article] is a strong argument for staying on top of what's going on in your boxes. It's a lot nicer to pick out freshly dead babies than long-dead ones.

I would add that placing bluebird boxes next to active feeders is a bad idea. Waaay too many infectious agents being passed around in a yard where summer feeding is going on. I'm working on several pieces and lots of thoughts about whether we are actually helping birds by feeding them. Big thoughts. I plan to air some of these issues in upcoming columns for *Bird Watcher's Digest*. After 22 years of contributing to *Bird Watcher's Digest*, I now have a column called "True Nature."

– Julie Zickefoose,
Liberty Township, Ohio

Complacency, Then Disaster

For many seasons, I had watched the bluebirds on my property successfully fledge at least two, and sometimes three, broods per season. Yes, there had been the occasional disaster. Raccoons downed the box and ate the eggs. An overzealous gardener moved the nest box, breaking the eggs. And a crow once snatched a nestling as it emerged. But none of these sad episodes were a direct result of my action, or, more accurately, inaction. Well, perhaps offered mealworms had attracted the crow that took the nestling, but I could never be positive about that connection.

This May, the cool and damp weather should have made me extra vigilant. Mealworms were hard to come by, and so I wasn't feeding the pair as often as usual. But I wasn't too concerned as I watched the adults busily flying in and out of the nest. I checked the box, but not frequently. As the days passed, I happily noted the sounds of the young as they loudly called to their parents. In another four or five days, they would be ready to fledge.

But then there was an ominous silence. The parents were gone. I knew instinctively that something had gone horribly wrong. I walked back and forth to the box several times before I got the nerve to open it. The four fully feathered nestlings were dead. One was nearly disintegrated, another badly damaged, but two looked fine, including one whose beak was still pointed up to the nest hole as if waiting for a meal. I initially blamed House Wrens that also nest on my property. Needing expert advice, I e-mailed Julie Zickefoose, a biologist, artist, and writer who has 26 bluebird boxes on her Ohio property.

At first Julie thought I might be right about the wrens, but she noted that they are more apt to kill bluebird babies after something kills their own young. She instructed me to check the wren boxes for damage and to listen for House Sparrow calls. I did both; the wren babies were fine, and no House Sparrows were in the area. I mentioned in my follow-up e-mail to Julie that the nestlings had been very close to fledging. She quickly e-mailed back, saying that wrens usually kill small, pink babies. She again asked me to describe the bodies: "When you say they were beat up, were the heads pecked?" I responded that one had huge red welts on her chest. One of my faults is that I am squeamish, I confessed. I get so upset looking at it that I can't be as scientific as I'd like.

Julie was having none of that. "This is sounding more like an infectious agent or an over infestation of blowflies," she said. "Hold your breath, take the nest apart and see if a bunch of squirmers or coffee-bean-looking pupae come out. For a bird to have killed them, the heads have to be pecked in. Really look at them. Just hold your breath and do it."

I found one larva, and examined the bodies closely. One fledging had obviously died many days earlier. I realized I most likely could have saved at least two of the nestlings had I been vigilant. I now believe that blowflies were the culprit, as I found a layer of clay-like, wet material in the nest, which is the end result of processed bluebird blood. Julie was kind, telling me not to be too hard on myself: "I'm glad I could help because now we have both learned something."

But I could not overlook my blunder. When the bluebirds returned a couple of weeks later, I turned into an overly protective parent, checking the nest every day. The weather was warmer, mealworms were plentiful, and the parents successfully fledged four healthy young. But next spring, even if the weather doesn't cooperate, I'll be ready for the worst.

– Carol Sottilli, *Fairfax*

Gift for Senior Center

A few months back I offered to give the Rockfish Valley Community Center Senior's group a talk about bluebirds. I was pleased to have Paul Davis and Gail Cooper accompany me for the presentation on August 21. Paul plans on taking over my job as county coordinator when I move back to New Jersey later this year. Gail has been my partner when we do my 21 box trail on the Rockfish Valley Foundation bluebird trail, and she will take over that trail.

Paul then built a bluebird box for the senior center and the three of us donated our time and the materials to install Paul's beautiful new VBS box on the Community Center's property as our gift to them. I also gave out VBS membership applications and the data forms for them to use when the box is monitored weekly. We showed the Stokes Video, which I received from VBS, on becoming the county coordinator. Paul demonstrated how to open the box he had built for them and what all the predator guards accomplished. There were lots of questions to answer and we all took part in answering them. Then we went out and examined our newly installed bb box and took pictures.

We had great cooperation from the manager of the community center, Bo Holland, for all this activity. The seniors now hope to install more boxes on the property and have a trail some day. They were very enthused about the presentation and will be good landlords to their bluebirds, or any other cavity nesters that might move in.

– *Milly Colella, Nelson County*

Q & A Column

How Many Eggs Can She Lay?

Question: Does a female bluebird have an unlimited supply of eggs? For example; if a female's nest is predated over and over, can she lay for as long as it takes to raise a family?

Answer: I went to the experts for this answer:

From Anne Hobbs, Public Information Specialist, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.birds.cornell.edu:

Most birds are physically capable of laying many more eggs than they actually lay during a season - this has been shown with food supplementation experiments in Great Tits and other birds (not to mention the prodigious 40-egg seasons of the Brown-headed Cowbird).

Birds also may adjust their output according to environmental conditions, but only to a limited extent. So I would say that there probably is some physiological limit on the number of eggs a female can produce in a season, but numerous factors other than physiology are likely to make the practical limit much lower. I'm afraid I don't know what the record number of clutches in a single year is for bluebirds.

From Bet Zimmerman, www.sialis.org:

The number of eggs a female bird will lay before her clutch is complete depends on several factors and each species has their own built in determiners: their food supply and diet; age and experience of the female; the health of the bird; the time of the year; latitude where the bird nests; availability of a mate; egg dumping; and predation.

[For more details, see www.sialis.org/eggnumbers.htm on Bet's Web site. If you have never visited her Web site, you are in for a wonderful bluebird treat.]

Do you have a question for the Q&A Column? Send it to Barb Chambers at bj.chambers@cox.net, or call 703-978-6609.

Rare Sighting

Brown-headed Nuthatch Nest

One of my nest boxes this spring had five brown-spotted eggs deposited on the bare floor of the box. The following week there were only two eggs in a nest of bark strips, grasses, and small petals. The nest and eggs were unfamiliar to me. I got a glimpse of the nesting bird up on a tree limb looking down and scolding me. It finally landed on the nest box, and I got a picture. It turned out to be a Brown-headed Nuthatch. First time I'd ever seen one, especially since Roanoke is far outside the fringes of its territory here in southwestern Virginia. Unfortunately, a week or so later a pair of Tree Swallows started their nest on top the eggs and existing nest and the nuthatch abandoned the box.

– *Earl Morris, Roanoke*



Brown-headed Nuthatch
(Photo: Earl Morris)

Strange Behavior

A female Tree Swallow had a clutch of five 5-day old nestlings. A pair of House Sparrows intervened. One sparrow killed the female swallow. The next morning, the female sparrow began feeding and rearing the swallow babies. She raised them to fledging. Three of the five babies made it out of the nest. An infestation of tiny ants may have killed the other two. The female sparrow continued to feed the three swallow babies after they fledged for three days. I lost track of them after that. – *Bruce Macdonald*

Corporate Donations and Matching Grants

Businesses such as Mobil Oil Corporation are willing to contribute as much as \$500 a year to non profit organizations for volunteer work done by their employees or retirees. For VBS, such volunteer work can include monitoring bluebird trails, building boxes, etc. Other companies, such as IBM, will provide matching grants if an employee or retiree makes a monetary contribution to the non profit.

A VBS champion or volunteer needs to check with his or her company to see if it provides these monies to non-profits such as ours. The volunteer completes the paperwork supplied by the company and then forwards it to VBS, which will then send it back to the company with a board member's signature.

Deadlines are involved, so check with your current or former company to see if they have such a program. Your completed paperwork can be forwarded to VBS Vice President Carmen Bishop, 4794 Tapestry Drive, Fairfax, VA 22032.



Volunteer Ben Young assisting White Oaks students Autumn Kelly, Genevieve Stafford, Cheryl Hafner, and Emily Scheiner (Photo: Carmen Bishop)

Thanks, Sarah

Our newsletter editor, Sarah McDade, has had to step down from her editing job here at *The Bird Box*. Sarah did a great job for the last two years, editing our stories and pictures. The Board of Directors wishes to thank her for her service and hopes she will continue to contribute articles as she can.

And the Mystery Egg Was . . .

The photo and story that ran in the last issue about the mysterious egg found under two inches of soil in my garden generated a lot of educated suggestions. Several readers suggested it was a turtle egg and others suggested a snake. These possibilities were eventually ruled out because the egg was solitary, bright white, oval, not leathery or supple, and quite brittle.

Two naturalists finally suggested that a fox or raccoon was transporting the egg to my newly tilled soil to hide it for future use. Three weeks after the newsletter was published, my son watched as three raccoons quickly scurried past him in the morning while he stood in our driveway. One went into a neighbors yard, another climbed a tree, and the third trotted into our backyard like he owned it! Two days later I found a broken chicken eggshell in my flowerbed.

The evidence is circumstantial, but I'm going to pin it on the raccoon. An email survey of 10 of my neighbors has brought me no further clues about the place of origin of the egg(s), but now I've got them thinking about it, so I may yet get to the bottom of the mystery.

– Sarah McDade, Fairfax

White Oaks Sixth Grade Project

This article was written by several students at White Oaks Elementary School in Burke, Virginia, on the day of their end-of-school party, which included time for all students to participate in their service project, building five bluebird boxes. Three of the boxes will be installed at the school and monitored by school families, and two will be replacement boxes on an existing nearby trail. The boxes at the school will provide a wonderful educational opportunity for teachers and students. Here are their words.

Our White Oaks Sixth Grade classes created amazing bird houses. We produced the bird houses for a bird that lives in Virginia and other places, the bluebird.

We made the bird houses to protect them from all harm, like snakes and other large birds and sparrows, and so they could have shelter. House Sparrows are an invading species. They fight bluebirds and control the territory and the land of the bluebird family.

As the bluebirds begin to make a family, the female produces 4-6 eggs at a time. It takes them two weeks for the incubation period to end.

We also selected the proper habitat for the bluebirds. This habitat consists of open fields around our school and spaces for the bluebirds to express their energy.

Our White Oaks 6th Grade Service Project this year was to make five houses to save them. We had many teams working at one time. Many groups participated in the construction of the boxes by putting all the screws in, while the next group designed and painted them, and finally a group collaborated to write this article. Our goal is to save the lives of future bluebird families.

The Last of the Mohicans

Late last August I discovered a pair of bluebirds, right in my yard and in full view of where I usually sit, with a new nest, containing four eggs. I was pleasantly surprised because it was so late in the season. Our trail of 21 boxes was totally finished by now. Of course I realized that this would be the last of the Mohicans.

I left on Sunday the 24th for a few days, and the eggs in the nest still hadn't hatched. I asked my husband, Rolland, to check on them every day. The eggs hatched the next day. We were delighted, and Rolland put mealworms every day into the green plastic dish that we keep on top of the box.

After I returned, the rains came! And on Thursday the 28th, Rolland went out to check the chicks. To his horror the nest and box were filled with *ants!* He called me out in the rain, and we both panicked. We knew the chicks would definitely die if we didn't do something fast. I took the nest out of the box and brought it inside. I put the nest on the kitchen counter and grabbed a nice clean cloth to wrap the chicks in. Because of the weather, our power was off, which meant we also had no water because there's an electric pump that runs our well. Now I had ants all over my counter and sink and couldn't wash them off because I had no water.

Rolland began cleaning the ants out of the box, and we, still in a panic, looked for some dry grass to make a new nest for the chicks. But nothing was dry. Oh my, what could we do? I considered putting the old nest in the microwave to kill the ants and dry the nest out, but I had no electricity. I also thought of getting some grass and drying it with a hair dryer, but again, no electricity!

"Hurry, Rolland!" I shouted. "We have to get the chicks back to the box because the mother is looking for them. I don't want her to leave. We have to do something." Rolland found an old straw hat. I began cutting it up to get some dry grass, but that didn't work. Then I ran out to the shed and found the old scarecrow that I use as a fall ornament. I cut the top off of Mr. Scarecrow's hat to use as a base and container for the loose straw that I took from his arm. I quickly built a new dry nest for those poor chicks. We took turns holding the chicks next to our bodies to keep them warm while we were hurriedly making the new nest. Finally, the ants were gone, the nest was ready, but would Mom accept this crazy creative new nest?

Back into the nest box it all went, and we waited and watched. There she was on top of the box, but she was hesitant. Finally she came near the hole but wouldn't go in. Again we watched and waited. It took the mother bluebird 45 minutes to get up enough courage to finally go in to see her chicks. Thank God! She stayed in the box and started caring for them.

They are now healthy, dry, and growing, and we are anxiously waiting for the day they fledge. We aren't sure who will be the proudest – those parent bluebirds or Rolland and me!

– *Milly Colella, Nelson County Coordinator*

Backdoor Bluebirds

My mother is a recent transplant from Michigan. She has a lovely yard and has a deck for the first time. So we gave her a VBS bluebird box. We set it up in the fall using the VBS protocol. The first bird to find it was a Downy Woodpecker. The little stinker put a hole in the rear portion of the side facing my Mom's deck. In anger I pulled the box out to avoid further damage.

In early spring we put the box back out. "And what to our wondering eyes should appear" but a pair of bluebirds who were thrilled with the new house in the neighborhood. You know the rest of the story. It was a great summer with two clutches occupying the box. Mom bought mealworms and fed the bluebirds every day. The fun part came with watching the tag-team duo of parents going in the front door of the house with the mealworms and out the downy-provided backdoor to land on the deck to get more.

– *Lori Aitken, Woodbridge*

Sparrow Traps Can Help

My husband, Paul, and I moved to Culpeper, Virginia, to be near triplet grandchildren (now seven years old). I had never seen a bluebird. When I heard there was a bluebird trail at Mountain Run Park, I contacted Brion Patterson, who was the coordinator there. Paul and I met with him and said we would help.

Barbara Chambers was so kind to come visit and give us information about how to monitor the birds. Since then, three years ago, we have added houses to Mt. Run and now have 11 placed around the park. This year we had more bluebirds fledged than ever.

Last spring I saw a bluebird up close for the first time, on my fence. We quickly put out the extra house Paul had made. I found the sparrows to be a big problem and after spending lots of money on traps I found the Van Ert trap to work the best. More information can be found online about this trap at www.nabluebirdsociety.org

As I fed the birds meal worms all summer they were very cooperative. Mother Bluebird disappeared two weeks before the babies fledged. Dad took care of them for two weeks and I watched him call them out of the nest. For four weeks afterward, he stayed with them and fed them on my back deck.

– *Barbara Tracy, Culpeper*



Man, that feels good! (Photo: Bob Gibson)



NABS 2009 Convention

Start planning your trip to NABS 2009. We will be meeting in the Holiday Inn Harrisburg/Hershey on September 11, 12, and 13, 2009. (Please note that this is a change from the information we put out earlier this spring). This location puts us in the heart of great fall birding at places like Hawk Mountain and the more accessible South Mountain. It is close enough to visit the new visitor center at the Gettysburg National Battlefield, Hershey is a short drive away, and the Pennsylvania Dutch country is at hand. There is even a new casino a mile away from our hotel. In other words, there is something for everyone!

– *Brian Swanson, Gainesville*

Lessons From a New Bluebirder

This is my third year of bluebirding. In my first year, 2006, my husband and I moved to our new home in Woolwine, Virginia, and found an old bluebird nestbox in the back yard. To our surprise, there were bluebirds nesting there upon our arrival that first week of March. But a week after we moved in, I found a big black rat snake hanging out of the box's entry hole. I was horrified! We cleaned out the box, built a hardware cloth baffle, and placed it underneath the box. The same pair apparently came back and tried again, but the second brood died the first day after hatching, from the 100-degree heat. After that, we took the box down, and I started my studies about bluebirds.

My second year, 2007, our new neighbors dropped off a nestbox as a gift. Carl Rupprecht, who made the box in his woodworking shop, helped me install it behind our house on a pole with a predator baffle. We were able to joyfully watch two broods make it into the world that season.

This year, my neighbor helped me build my first bluebird trail of 14 boxes. I experimented by doubling up the boxes 15 feet apart, because we had seen Tree Swallows diving out of the trees and into our pond the year before. Some of the boxes on the trail were not occupied, but the ones that attracted Carolina Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds. The first broods did well and fledged. I had no snake predation and no House Sparrows.

The second nesting proved problematic. I noticed that one of my boxes seemed to be in trouble. I photographed the parents from afar in the field one morning and was wondering why the male came with food only four times within two hours. When I checked the box the next day, I found the chicks had died, all four of them. I immediately removed them and the nest and took them back home to investigate what happened.

Blowflies! I was stunned. As I thought about it, we had three days of over 90-degree heat the week before. There was a lot of dust at the bottom of the box underneath the pine needle nest, and I saw the larvae in it as well. I found one live and one dead adult blowfly in the center of the nest buried in there, and more larvae. When I looked at the dead chicks on the underside, I didn't see larvae attached to them. I then realized that I was not checking closely enough for any indication blowflies even existed – my first experience with this problem. I did look for insects and didn't see any. The nest appeared clean, and I watched the parents bring food. Now I realize the blowfly larvae were hidden inside the nest underneath the babies, and I had missed them completely.

I felt sad that the second brood died, but I also was on alert for blowflies on the trail. Sure enough, I found another nestbox with blowflies. The chicks looked anemic and weak at five days, and they had feathers only in stripes on their backs. This time I had to intervene! I quickly switched the contaminated pine needle nest with a homemade pine needle nest. I put the needles in, tamped it down with my fist, and added some grasses for softness. I carefully picked up the sick five-day-old chicks and placed them in the new nest while my husband stood by with an umbrella to shade us from the sun. Both parents were watching me in the trees and came back to the box a few minutes later. I left the nest alone for a few days. When I checked on Day 8, I was truly amazed! The chicks were larger, growing feathers again, and looking bluer and healthier. They fledged at exactly 18 days.

I've learned as a new monitor that there will be losses. However, with love and devotion and learning about these marvelous birds each year, the celebrations outweigh the losses, and monitoring is worth every minute of my time. I have a feeling of accomplishment helping the beloved bluebirds!

– *Christine Boran, Blue Ridge Highlands, Woolwine, Patrick County*

An Astounding Dilemma

A couple of days ago I was walking through the house, and I noticed something was different; something was not quite right, but what was it? At first I couldn't quite put my finger on it, then I realized what it was. The house seemed to be tilted ever so slightly to one side, not much mind you, but just enough to be noticeable, especially when walking.

To see if this was really true I picked up an apple from the fruit bowl on the dining room table and placed it on the table. Sure enough it began to roll ever so gently to one side. I still wasn't completely convinced so I went to the sink and ran a glass of water. I set it on the counter and just as I thought, the water was listing a little to one side of the glass. The angle of tilt was minuscule, but it was definitely there.

While I was pondering this phenomenon, I happened to glance out of the kitchen window and *ah ha!* There was the answer right in front of me. There must have been at least 25 hummers at the feeder hanging outside the window. They were all trying to feed at once, nearly sitting on each other's backs in their efforts to get at the sweet, if manmade, nectar. The feeder was hanging from a hook that was attached to the top of the window frame, and therein was the root of the problem. There were so many hummers trying to get on the feeder that they were causing the house to list to one side, like a ship slowly taking on water.

Considering that our house is made of thick logs, that was no small feat, but what would happen if more hummers came to that feeder? This could become a serious problem. Pipes could start leaking; windows could shatter. What to do?

Of course the obvious course of action would be to take down the feeder. But being a man who doesn't like to upset the balance of nature, I pushed that temptation from my mind. These hummers needed the food to build up their strength and their body fat for that long flight they would making south in a couple of months. Besides, there were lots of juveniles in the bunch, and they needed to grow strong and produce strong flight feathers and flight muscles.

After thinking on the problem for a few minutes, I came up with a solution. I quickly got some tools and another feeder. I went to the opposite side of the house from the feeder being used, and I attached a hook and hung a second feeder there. Then I waited. After a few minutes, a Ruby-throat came zipping by and paused at the new feeder. He looked it over, hovered for a moment, then gingerly placed his feet on the perch and began to drink. In another few seconds, he was joined by a second, then a third. Soon there were almost as many hummers on this side of the house as there were on the other side. This just might work.

I rushed back into the house, and it relieved my mind to find the house starting to tilt back, ever so slowly. In fact the movement was so slow it was almost imperceptible. My wife didn't seem to notice it all. For that matter, she hadn't seemed to notice that the house had been leaning in the first place. Perhaps I was just more perceptive.

Within 30 minutes, the house was level again and things returned to normal. I breathed a sigh of relief, feeling pretty proud of myself that I had solved the problem, and yet had kept nature in balance.

This was such an event I felt it needed to be documented, so I took photos of these fat little flying darts. They can be seen at:
www.pbase.com/mayhorn/hummers_7_08.

– Roger Mayhorn, Compton Mountain, Buchanan County

A Mapping Tool For Nest Data

A free science project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center lets you submit your nest observations and see the results in Google MAPS. Project NestWatch (at watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/) combines the information from your box locations with observations from over 3,000 other participants. It shows results from the nest level to the national level.

Viewing nest results at small spatial scales across time is perhaps the map's strongest feature. You can view animation of eastern bluebird first egg dates across the entire eastern United States as they occurred for a specific year. You can also see the latitudinal differences in clutch size by state or by 100K grids.

Sometimes the performance of the map can be rather slow, and occasionally results don't appear when I know they should. But integrating and summarizing data via mapping brings nesting data to life as you see it transformed into information across a familiar landscape.

– David Mitchell, Lovettsville

In Memoriam

Ira Lee Campbell, 91, of Timberville, Virginia, died on September 21 at Harrisonburg Health and Rehabilitation Center. He was born in 1917, in Timberville, and lived there his whole life. Ira was a charter member of the North American Bluebird Society and was known as "The Bluebird Man" for many years in Harrisonburg. Ira monitored 100 nest boxes at one time that he had built himself and placed along country roads in Rockingham County. Without pioneers like Ira, who stepped in early to stop the decline of bluebirds, our organization might not even exist. The next time you see a bluebird, take a moment to say a little prayer of thanks and remembrance for Ira and bluebirders like him.

The Bird Box

Issue 10.2

Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Our *e-mail address* is:
vbs@virginiabluebirds.org
If you have a new e-mail address, or have recently changed it, please let us know.

Bird Box Interim Editor

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We welcome your written items and artwork
(photos and drawings) for *The Bird Box*!
Please e-mail your materials to Anne.



Calendar

Today. If you have not turned in your data yet, please do so as soon as possible. Contact Charlie Chambers, ce.chambers@cox.net, 703-978-6609

November 1. Winterize your boxes if you are going to do that. At least consider dry grass in the bottom.

November 12, Wed. 8:45 a.m. Bird Conservation Alliance Meeting: "Bird Migration Matters; Building Support for Migratory Bird Conservation" The Nature Conservancy Worldwide Offices, Arlington, VA. The Bird Conservation Alliance meeting will focus on migratory bird conservation. For more info: www.birdconservationalliance.org.

November 12, Wed. 12:30p.m. Bluebird presentation by Anne Little, Henrico Master Gardeners

November 13, Thurs., 7:30 p.m. Presentation by Earl Morris, Salem Novel Club, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Salem

January 1. Line up trail monitors for the coming season. Recruit and train volunteers where needed.

March 6. VBS Spring Board Meeting. Richmond. All invited.

How to Join

Send your name, address, phone number, and/or e-mail address along with a check for \$10 for an individual or \$15 for a family to:

Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Membership forms can be downloaded from the VBS Web site:
www.virginiabluebirds.org.

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726 William Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

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