

The Bird Box Bird Box

Fall 2021 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org



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A Wildlife Viewing Plan for Virginia

By Jessica Ruthenberg, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

Do you recall participating in a focus group of a survey on wildlife viewing in Virginia or did you submit a comment on a draft Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan? If so, thanks to your input and that of over 4,000 others, the Commonwealth now has an official, finalized Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan. On May 27 of this year, the Board of Directors for the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) endorsed the Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan, the agency’s first comprehensive plan developed specifically for engaging with and supporting wildlife viewing across the Commonwealth. The DWR Board’s exciting endorsement marked the culmination of a 3.5-year collaborative effort between the DWR and Virginia Tech’s Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation. This plan holds great significance as it will guide the agency’s efforts related to wildlife viewing over the next ten years. Becky Gwynn, the DWR’s Deputy Director shares the excitement about this achievement, noting that “this blueprint is the first of its kind in the country – it’s really exciting to know that Virginia continues to be a leader in developing and promoting wildlife viewing opportunities and connecting people with nature.”

The plan defines wildlife viewing as “intentionally observing, feeding [wild birds], photographing wildlife, or visiting or maintaining natural areas because of wildlife.” It outlines the following four major goals that set the overarching direction and priorities for what the DWR will strive to accomplish in regards to wildlife viewing.

Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan Goals:

- Connect diverse segments of the public to wildlife and wildlife viewing in Virginia
- Provide a variety of wildlife viewing opportunities accessible to all in the Commonwealth
- Promote wildlife and habitat conservation through wildlife viewing
- Connect broader constituencies to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources through wildlife viewing

These goals, as well as the objectives, strategies, and potential tactics that accompany them, were informed by a participatory planning process and a three-part study of wildlife recreationists. The Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan was co-produced by the Dayer Human-Dimensions

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Wildlife Viewing Plan, continued from page 1

Lab at Virginia Tech, 15 DWR staff serving on a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and 14 individuals and organizational representatives with experience in wildlife viewing that served on a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). The birding community was well represented on the SAC, including Laura Neale (VSO), Bob Schamerhorn (Richmond Audubon Society), Kathie Driscoll (Lynchburg Birding Club), and Mary Foster (Virginia Southside Bird Club).

The three-part study, in which many of you may have participated, was initiated and funded by the DWR and conducted by Virginia Tech. It utilized focus groups, a survey of Virginia residents, a survey of wildlife recreationists affiliated with DWR, and a web-based stakeholder analysis. Further public input was received through broad promotion of a draft plan and a call for public comment.

In order to implement this ambitious plan over the next ten years, the DWR has formed a Wildlife Viewing Plan Implementation Committee that will lead this plan forward.

To learn more and find a copy of the full [Virginia Wildlife Viewing Plan](#), visit the wildlife viewing section of the Department of Wildlife website.



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DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE RESOURCES
CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.

Department of Wildlife Resources Supports Virginia Bluebird Society and the Eastern Bluebird

By Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, President, Virginia Bluebird Society

For many years, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries was a very generous supporter of VBS through \$1000.00 grants which we used to help fund new nest box trails, refurbish trails in need of attention, and even place nest boxes with cameras in schools.

In 2020 the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation renaming the Virginia Department of Game and inland Fisheries (DGIF) the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

Of course, DWR's stated mission to "Conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations," dovetails (or is that "bluebirdtails"?) nicely with VBS' goal of promoting bluebird conservation.

Then in January 2021, we received the very good news from Jessica Ruthenberg, our DWR liaison, that she was hoping to increase our historical \$1000.00 grant and would need a letter of application explaining how VBS used the 2020 grant, and what we hoped to do with a future award.

Writing that letter was easy enough. In 2020, DWR monies contributed to fund building and installing a new trail at Turner Farm Park and the refurbishment of the Pohick Bay Trail in Fairfax County; the refurbishment of the trail at Spilman Park in Culpeper; building and installing a new trail at Harrisonburg Elementary; and building and installing a new trail at Ashlawn Elementary in Arlington County,

Our goals in 2021 include at minimum, installation of nest boxes with cameras (average cost \$132) in nine schools, as well as funding at least three new trails totaling 30 nest boxes at an approximate cost of \$1525. And that's just the tip of the iceberg (or "edge of the nest").

The good news of 2021?

Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources awarded VBS a grant of \$1500.00! We are so very grateful for DWR's past support and are positively thrilled with DWR's expanded support.

What's Happening With Nest Cam Grants - Caledon State Park

By Vickie Fuquay, VBS Vice President, Education

School nest cams are not just for schools but also for educating the public about our beautiful bluebirds in Virginia and how Virginia Bluebird Society is helping with their comeback. Caledon State Park is located in King George County between Fairview Beach and Owens, 23 miles east of Fredericksburg on Route 218. A National Natural Landmark known for its old growth forest and summer home to many American Bald Eagles, Caledon attracts bird watchers of all ages. Trails, including Boyd's Hole Trail, which leads to the Potomac River, are open year-round. A visitor center with Bald Eagle exhibits, four picnic areas, a picnic shelter and restrooms also are available. For information about Caledon State Park, click on [General information \(virginia.gov\)](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/caledon) or go to <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/caledon>.

Caledon has a very active bluebird trail with 22 boxes in place. The first boxes were installed more than ten years ago and with their success, ten more were built and donated by a local Girl Scout troop in 2018. The Friends of Caledon (a non-profit group that supports the park) helped distribute the new boxes along a hiking trail that goes to the Potomac River. There were residents in some of the new boxes within two days, and most of them have at least two nests per year. The Virginia Master Naturalists Central Rappahannock Chapter and Virginia Bluebird Society monitor these boxes. The preliminary report shows 101 bluebirds fledged from their trail this year. The camera box has been placed outside of the visitor center so that next summer all visitors who enter may observe bluebirds inside the nesting boxes for an up-close and personal view!



VBS Nest Cams are also up and running in two locations at Pocahontas State Park in Chesterfield, VA, one in the visitor center and one in the camp store. For information about Pocahontas State Park click here [General information \(virginia.gov\)](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/pocahontas) or go to <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/pocahontas>.

VBS takes education outside the schools to further educate the public.

Photo, left to right, Becky Taft, trail lead from VBS, Mackenzie Guenther, Caledon interpreter, and Andrew Paul, Caledon Park Ranger, standing next to the newly installed camera box at Caledon State Park in Prince George County

Photo by Mark Adrian

What's Happening With New and Refurbished Trails Grants

By Doug Rogers, VBS Vice President, Trails, and Vickie Fuquay, VBS Vice President, Education

The activity in this grant program has been steady this year. We had carryover funds of \$321.00 from last year which, when added to this year's funds of \$2,500.00, gave me a total of \$2,821.00 to use. To date, we have approved six grants for a total of \$1,939.10. This leaves \$881.90 that is unspoken for as of this date.

Those six grants will cover the costs of 25 new complete setups, and five replacement nest boxes. Also, it will cover the costs of 32 sets of guards on existing nest boxes.

As we get into the fall months, I am anticipating that we will run out of money. In the past, if we got more grant requests than we had money, the Board approved more dollars to this program. I am hoping that the board will look favorably on that need again, if it arises.

Two grants fulfilled for parks in Southern Virginia, have resulted in much needed housing for the area bluebirds. The first grant was issued in February of this year for a new bluebird trail to be set up in Wayside Park in Hurt, Virginia. There was a perfect habitat and a park manager who was willing to install a trail and monitor the houses weekly. Dennis Irby installed the new boxes on February 18th with bluebirds following him and checking out the boxes that very day. Dennis found the first bluebird egg on April 5th. For the first breeding season, Dennis reported 17 bluebird eggs and 12 that fledged! This was a brand new trail so we expect many more blues next year. For more information about Wayside Park, click here [Wayside Park | Pittsylvania County, VA - Official Website \(pittsylvaniacountyva.gov\)](https://pittsylvaniacountyva.gov/609/Wayside-Park) or go to <https://pittsylvaniacountyva.gov/609/Wayside-Park>.

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What's Happening With New and Refurbished Trails, Continued from page 3

The second grant was awarded to Staunton River State Park in July which had 15 boxes in very bad repair and many lacked predator guards. The boxes had been in use since spring of 2010. VBS New and Refurbished Grants came to the rescue with 15 new boxes, poles, 8" baffles, and Noel guards. The new box setups were delivered August 23 and have been installed in order that the birds get used to them by next spring. This year they fledged a total of 114 birds, 88 bluebirds and 26 tree swallows. To learn more about the park, which is the first state park in Virginia to be designated as an International Dark Sky Park, follow the link [General information \(virginia.gov\)](https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/staunton-river) or go to <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/staunton-river>.

What's Happening With Youth and Scout Grants

By Carmen Bishop, Fairfax County

Seven grants have been approved so far this year, totaling over \$2,000. Projects have been led by one Girl Scout, five Boy Scouts, and one middle school teacher to provide over 60 nest boxes with predator guards. The boxes have been put to use at public parks, a botanical garden, and a school. Fall and winter are a great time to install nest boxes, so scouts and other youth are encouraged to apply. Click here for more information: <https://www.virginiabluebirds.org/grant-programs> or go to www.virginiabluebirds.org, About VBS, Grant Programs.

Spotlight on a County Coordinator: Carla Davis, Henrico County

What inspired you to be a county coordinator?

I'm always looking for meaningful ways to participate in citizen science. I adore bluebirds, so when I learned of the county coordinator vacancy in Henrico County, I was excited to accept this role.

What is your experience working with bluebirds?

As a birder and hobby photographer, I spend countless hours each year watching and photographing bluebirds. I come from a family of bird lovers. My parents have a bluebird box at their house in Lancaster County.

What do you enjoy most about bluebirds and other cavity nesters?

More than anything, I enjoy their beauty! I love attracting them to my yard and watching them raise their broods.

What do you wish others knew about you?

I'm a native of Henrico County, a professional writer, and a long-time vegan.



Carla Davis, VBS Henrico County Coordinator

Photo by Carla's father, Guy Davis

VBS Takes Its Show on the Highway – Four-lane or Information!

Know a Master Naturalist or Master Gardener chapter in need of a program? How about a garden club, school, or ecology club? Elementary school classroom? Your homeschool group?

Virginia Bluebird Society has programs we will tailor to your audience. We can always present via Zoom, and depending upon where and when your group meets, may be able to present in person.

Recent presentations by board directors were given to a Danville Girl Scout troop, the Centreville Garden Club, Hill City Master Gardeners, and Southside Bird Club, among others.

Interested? [Email: vbs@virginiabluebirds.org](mailto:vbs@virginiabluebirds.org)

Beat the 2022 Dues Increase!

Renew your VBS membership now. New dues will go into effect March 1, 2022. Details available soon.

Join or renew now and lock your membership in until February 28, 2023.

Membership application available at <https://www.virginiabluebirds.org/support-vbs> or go to www.virginiabluebirds.org, About VBS, Forms and Documents.



Have you heard the news?

Photo by David Kinneer

Nestbox Sharing - Bluebirds and Squirrels

By Amber Kimmich, Powhatan, Virginia

We have had a successful bluebird box on our property for over ten years. The bluebirds chase off every other bird that even thinks about trying to nest in it. A few weeks ago I noticed that the bluebirds, who were on their third brood of babies, were very agitated at the nesting box. I also noticed that the box was missing the snake guard and had some chewing around the entrance. I should have known that something was up. When I went out, I knocked on the nesting box, and of course, a squirrel poked her head out and ran away. I didn't think anything of it at the time, and went about my day. Later that evening, I noticed the same agitation and went back to the box. The same squirrel came running out. So I put up a new guard and did my best to keep an eye out. It wasn't an hour before I saw the squirrel come back to the box. I am a former rehabber with AWARE for Virginia and have held a federal bird license, so I knew there was a problem in the nest. We got the ladder, unscrewed the hinges, and we were shocked to find three baby squirrels nestled in with three almost fledging baby bluebirds! I also knew this was not going to work. We figured the best plan of action was to move the birds.



I had an extra box with a guard already on it. We have fencing with a post every few feet around the garden, so we moved it about five feet away. My husband and I pulled out part of the nesting material with the birds, and left the squirrels. We relocated the birds to the new box. The parent bluebirds kept a close eye on the new box the entire time, and chattered away at us. At first, they were not happy, but it only took about ten minutes before they started checking out the new box and were back to feeding and caring for the babies.

As for the squirrels, the only thing we can figure as to why the squirrel decided to do this, is that she was using a nesting box (put up a while back for rehabbed squirrels) on a tree about ten feet away, and it fell during a storm the previous night. Maybe she felt this was the easiest and fastest way to care for her babies, or perhaps they had an agreement. Not sure, but she wasn't taking no for an answer, and her babies were moved right up in there with baby birds. She has since continued care with a few tail swipes from the birds when she returns to the nest. The young bluebirds fledged the nest about five days after we moved them. We have seen them with mom and dad, learning to feed, and seem to be doing well. Nature always reminds us that we need them, and sometimes they need us.



Top right: squirrel kits and bluebird nestlings sharing a bluebird nest.

Bottom left: squirrel kits snuggled up to bluebird nestlings.

Bottom right: bluebird nestlings in their new nest.

Photos by Amber Kimmich



Pantops Mountain Paired Nest Box Experiment Follow-up

By Doug Rogers, VBS Vice President, Trails

Let's start with a little history for those who are not familiar with this project: I have been monitoring Eastern Bluebird nest boxes on three pieces of private property, now four, for the past 13 or 14 years. The number of boxes on my trail has ranged between 16 and 18. The first year was the most successful up until this year. At the beginning, I had 6" snake guards and my Noel guards were not "pronged out." I did not use false bottoms, made from hardware cloth, and used no diatomaceous earth (DE). The first year was great!

Starting from the second year forward, I have had predators from Black Rat snakes, blowflies, House Sparrows, House Wrens, and other, unknown predators. Each year, I adapted and reduced the predation problems. I added 8" snake guards, installed pronged out Noel guards, put in false bottoms and used DE below the nests, moved the affected boxes away from House Wren territory, and after much soul-searching, finally (it took me three years) got the Van Ert trap to deal with House Sparrows.

That left only one other serious issue: Tree Swallows taking over my trail. At first, I used the VBS protocol of paired boxes 15' to 20' apart. I had four sets of nest boxes (8 boxes) paired that way. That worked somewhat for about four years. Then, starting about five years ago, the Tree Swallows decided that other Tree Swallow families were okay neighbors. They took over all of my paired boxes.

Last year, acting on the suggestion of my raptor researcher friends who live in Timberville, I put 14 boxes on 7 poles - two boxes per pole in the area that was most impacted by Tree Swallows. And I had six more boxes, each on one pole, in the territory that was the least impacted by Tree Swallows. The number of nest boxes and their locations, in years prior to 2017, are not comparable to the years beginning in 2017.

The results are shown below.

Year	Nests	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged
Bluebirds				
2021	30	121	91	84
2020	18	78	64	64
2019	14	59	51	40
2018	13	56	51	48
2017	9	38	33	32
Tree				
2021	6	22	20	18
2020	5	26	26	19
2019	10	38	37	34
2018	9	44	33	25
2017	12	40	22	22



Male bluebird bringing food to nestlings in one box of closely paired nest boxes.

Photo by Doug Rogers

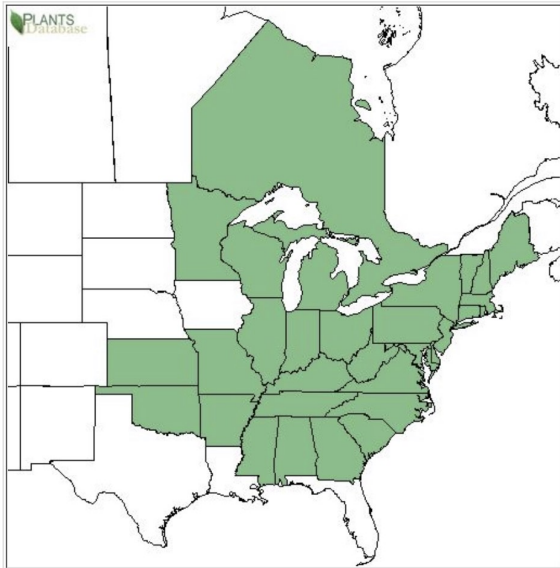
In the 2021 nesting season, we had significantly more eggs but a lot of them didn't hatch due to the cold snap in the spring.

So what happened to 30 eggs that didn't hatch in 2021? There was an early nest with six eggs and after about 10 days, for some unknown reason, it was abandoned. In another nest, the female was injured when I opened the box to monitor it and the nest was subsequently abandoned. I have two sets of paired boxes (two boxes on each of two poles), which have never had snake predation before, and the baffles were only 6'; they were attacked by snakes, taking out eight eggs. One other box was invaded by a cowbird, the bluebird eggs removed, and the cowbird hatchling was ultimately eaten by a snake. The remainder was simply a case of the eggs not hatching.

I have been asked several times, "Why does pairing two boxes on a single pole deter Tree Swallows?" The best answer I can give is: "I don't know for sure. Based on my observations, it seems that the bluebirds are better able to defend the paired box. And in each of the two years I have done this, there has been one pair of boxes that had a bluebird family on one side and a Tree Swallow family on the other. Both successfully fledged young."

Whatever the reason, if you look at my numbers, you will have to conclude that it is working.

Attracting (and Feeding) Birds with Native Plants—Blueridge Blueberry



Distribution of Blue Ridge blueberry. Map courtesy of USDA, NRCS. 2018. The [PLANTS Database](#). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC. [2018, August 30] [56].

Blue Ridge Blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*), also known as Early Lowbush Blueberry, is a native deciduous shrub in the Ericaceae (blueberry) family and can be found in dry woodlands, on forest slopes, in clearings, and in thickets. It grows from Minnesota and southern Ontario to Maine, and southward to the uplands of Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas. Blue Ridge Blueberry grows throughout the Ozarks, southern Appalachians, and the Coastal Plain.

It is a low maintenance and drought tolerant plant growing 9 inches to two feet tall with dark brown twigs, alternate, elliptic leaves, dark green above and paler beneath. Its flowers appear in April to May and are white or reddish. Fruits appear in June to July. Leaves turn red to burgundy color in fall.

Light requirement: Sun, part shade, shade

Soil moisture: Dry, moist

Soil description: Dry, sandy, or gravelly soils, as well as heavy clay. It grows well in acidic soils.

Insects, diseases, and other plant problems: This plant will not survive in alkaline soils.



Blooms on Blueridge Blueberry are white or reddish. Photo by Janis Stone

This is a high-value wildlife plant as the berries are eaten by many birds, including the Eastern Bluebird, gray catbird, chickadees, finches, Northern Cardinal and Tufted Titmouse, among others.

The shrub is a nectar plant for bumblebees, mason, sweat, carpenter, and several mining bees. It is recognized by pollination ecologists as attracting large numbers of native bees.

It is a caterpillar host plant for Striped Hairstreak, Brown Elfin, and Henry Elfin butterflies, as well as 250 other butterflies and moths. Turtles also eat the berries.

Lowbush blueberry can be used as an ornamental shrub in the native garden or naturalized area, and is especially suitable in a butterfly, pollinator, or edible garden.

References: U.S. Dept of Agriculture, Forest Service; Planting for Wildlife in Northern Virginia; North Carolina State Extension; Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping; Plantnovanatives.org.



Left: male Eastern Bluebird eating berries. Photo by Dave Kineer.

Right: Ripe and nearly-ripe Blueridge Blueberry berries. Photo by Janis Stone



The Problem with House Wrens

By Kelly Gough

The day I nearly stepped on the Eastern Rat Snake was the day I finally took my Christmas gift of ankle-high hiking boots out of the box and decided to start wearing them on my regular trail walks around the St. Benedictine Monastery in Bristow, Virginia.

The snake was there, next to bluebird nestbox #8, almost hidden in the grass that needed mowing. Six feet long and scales shining in the sun. It was the first time in nearly three years of



managing the bluebird trail that I had seen a snake on the property. I kept my eyes on him for any sudden movements (do snakes HAVE any sudden movements?) as I unscrewed the nest box panel to inspect its contents. Immediately I knew what had drawn the snake to this spot. Of the three Tree Swallow eggs in the box, two bore the distinct calling card of a House Wren attack: puncture wounds that were oozing some of their yolk contents into the nest. I wondered how many times the snake had tried to get into the nest box to enjoy the buffet, only to be defeated by the stove pipe baffle.



House Wrens are a protected native songbird and are a common tenant at the monastery. You may not always see them. This is not because they lack numbers, but because of their diminutive size and unremarkable color. What they lack in stature and appearance, however, they make up for in voice. They sing beautifully and are by far the predominant sound filling the air around the property, especially when they are singing for a mate. As a bluebird trail monitor, that song has come to mean only one thing: trouble, for a trail full of House Wrens can go barren of anything else.

House Wrens, you see, don't simply build a nest and settle down to raise a small family or two. They are not good neighbors. They are prolifically successful breeders who occupy more space than they will ever actually use. When the season for love comes around, the male House Wren starts building... and building... and building! He will toil away building two or even three nests, each of incredibly uncomfortable looking twigs which will fill the entire nest box right up to the rafters. If an unlucky Eastern Bluebird or Tree Swallow family is camped out in the House Wren's territory during this wave of construction they are in grave danger. If these parents leave their nest to go feed, or allow themselves to be bullied out of their nest, their eggs or young hatchlings are doomed to the destructive pecking of the House Wren who is just looking to create another sample nest for the ladies to evaluate. Sadly, this is what had occurred to our swallows in box #8. First the eggs each receive a puncture wound from the wren's sharp, pointed beak. Then the eggs are removed from the box. When taking over a Tree Swallow nest, our wrens, used to the scratchy twigs, apparently take exception to the swallow's layer of cozy feathers so they are removed as well.

When Mr. Wren has completed his round of construction, he will take a high perch on or near the boxes and sing his heart out until a prospective mate is drawn to him. He takes her on a tour of each of the nests he has constructed. If she is satisfied with one of them, Ms. Wren will complete the building process, often reorganizing the same materials. They will settle in and produce the largest clutch of eggs on the trail – as many as 6 to 8 at a time, generally all of which will hatch.

Even if we were to overlook the sheer rate of reproduction of these birds, there remains the problem of the unused



All story photos by Kelly Gough

The Problem with House Wrens, continued from page 8

extra nests that remain. Because these boxes are clogged with twigs, known as “dummy nests,” they are unusable by any other cavity nester including our intended residents: the Eastern Bluebirds.

Being a protected species means that, once a nest is constructed to the point of containing an egg cup (and certainly if you discover a nest with eggs), the nest is off-limits to any interference and nature must run its course. The design of a House Wren nest often leaves the monitor unable to see inside. To comply with the State and Federal guidelines protecting native songbirds, if you cannot ascertain that the nest is active or inactive, you need to leave it in place for several weeks before cleaning the box out “just in case.”

Despite almost daily visits to the trail this year, sometimes House Wrens beat me to it. They build so quickly and lay eggs just as fast. If I find a small assembly of twigs in the nest box, I know House Wrens are starting to build. Discovered before the egg cup is formed, I am free to evict our greedy tenant. But once the egg cup is present there is nothing to do but sigh, close the box up, and try to take comfort in having done your best to control the population. In their insatiable desire to occupy as many nest boxes as possible, in the 2021 season House Wrens were responsible for destroying three Tree Swallow clutches, three Eastern Bluebird clutches, and the monastery’s first ever box-laid clutch of Tufted Titmouse eggs.

So, if you see a trail monitor looking despairingly into an open box or perhaps cleaning out a few random twigs, rest assured they are just removing excess materials that the House Wren will never need. This manual removal of dummy nest materials aids our other native cavity nesters, offering them the opportunity to call the monastery ground home too.



*The House Wrens’ insatiable desire for multiple nest box spaces often leads to the destruction of other cavity nesters’ clutches, such as these Tufted Titmouse eggs.
All story photos by Kelly Gough*

Golf Course Bluebirds

By Beverly Arnold, Orange County, LOWA Member and VBS Monitor

Reprinted with permission from Lake Currents, newsletter of the Lake of the Woods Association, Inc.

This is the sixth year that the bluebird nest boxes on every hole of the Lake of the Woods golf course have been monitored weekly in the spring and summer by trained volunteers of the Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS). These nest boxes have fledged an average of 116 eastern bluebirds every year, and also host Carolina Chickadees and House Wrens. Ours is the largest group of bluebird nest boxes monitored by the Virginia Bluebird Society in Orange County.



Last year at this time 56 bluebirds had fledged. This year we are on *Stock photo*

track with an equal number, and at least half of the bluebirds are also beginning their second nesting. However, the end of the year total will be less than previous years due to the loss of the hole #11 nest box which historically fledges 10 bluebirds every year.

If any local organizations are interested, LOW resident and VBS Orange County Coordinator Chris Browning is available for informative talks and additional information on the bluebirds and the local trails, as well as the Virginia Bluebird Society. He can be reached at cbjr74sa@gmail.com.

We appreciate the support of the golf course and its members in helping to conserve bluebirds and other cavity nesters. We especially appreciate the continuing support of the Ladies Golf Association in providing the funds to replace the post and nest box.

What Should Be My Name?

I am a tiny hatchling in a bluebird's nest, or I could be any species of bird, but I am called by many names. I am called a chick, a nestling, and many of you even call me a baby when talking about my nest-mates and me. But really, I am a nestling! That is my accurate name. Now, what could be the difference? All these names do describe me, and people seem to understand you no matter what you call me. So what's the big deal? Well, there is a difference! *A baby is human. A chick can get up, leave its nest, and walk away following its parent bird in just a few hours. Think chicken (which must be where that name came from), or killdeer, or duck. It takes me 16 to 18 days, and sometimes even 21 days, to leave my nest and be able to fly. Therefore, I am correctly called a nestling. That is where I live for quite a while – in a nest. I know (sigh!), it is just a technicality, but I would surely like to be called by the right name while I am spending all that time in my often-crowded nest! So I answer to chick, as that has come to mean any young bird, but nestling is more accurate as I remain in my nest while I grow fast and develop. When I fly out, you may call me a fledgling!*

The Bluebird Advisor

By Christine Boran and Anne Little



Bird Survival Rates

Reprint from the VBS Bird Box, March 2005 Issue

Not every egg that is laid will hatch and not every bird that fledges will survive. The fact that VBS raises cavity nesting birds and offers two predator guards probably adds to the survival rate of the bird from egg to breeding adult. We thank Diane Barbin of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Bluebird Society for the following information, which came from the Cornell Bluebird List and ornithology.com. A successful nest is one in which some young are fledged. The percentage of young fledging varies widely within and between species. Among songbirds in temperate areas, the proportion of eggs that eventually become flying young varies between 30 and 80 percent. M. Nice (1957) analyzed data from 7,788 open nests of altricial birds [Editor: born blind and helpless] and found that the success rate ranged from 38 to 77 percent (average 49 percent), and among cavity nesters, 66 percent. For asynchronous-hatching species [Editor: not all hatching the same day], the chief cause of mortality is starvation. For synchronous hatchers, it's starvation and climate and especially predation. Once the young leave their nesting areas, their chances of surviving to breed the next year are about 60 percent – the same as for adults. For a typical songbird, these are the chances of survival :

To fledging: 50 percent

To juvenile from fledging: 50 percent

To breeding from fledging: 60 percent

From egg to breeding adult: 15 percent



Photo by Rebecca Boyd

The age at which a bird first reproduces is important to the growth rate of the population. Virtually all terrestrial species breed in the first year after hatching except swifts (2 years), many parrots (2-3 years), and raptors (3-5 years) and a few males of some passerines (Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds). Heavy mortality is associated with migration. Mortality is mainly due to the weather, food shortage, and predation. Weather can be particularly

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Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Our email address is:

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We welcome your written items and artwork (photos and drawings) for *The Bird Box*.

Email your materials to Judy Hall.

disastrous at times. In Song Sparrows and Tufted Titmice, over 70 percent of the adults die each year. Thus an average individual can expect to live one year. In most songbirds the figure is 40-60 percent mortality. But mortality is independent of age after maturity in birds. Birds generally do not die of old age but succumb to environmental factors.

Bluebirds' Success Rate

By Harry Schneider, Butler, Pennsylvania, March 15, 2008

Used with permission

Most of my studies indicate that 70% of Bluebird fledglings do not make it through the first year. On average, 40% die in the first 30 days after leaving the nest. This is when the fledglings are most vulnerable. After 90 days the juvenile's chances increase. Another 30% do not make it through the first year. If I recall correctly, if they survive the first year the mortality rate drops to 20%. Now much depends on weather, availability of food, experience/age of the parents, geographic region, urban vs. rural areas, disease, pesticides and predators, etc., so the percentile varies.

In general, the more physically developed the young are when they leave the nest, the greater their chances are of survival. The quality of parental care, the number of siblings competing for that care, and the timing of fledging are also important factors. Bluebirds dealing with nature, life become a challenge and so often the obstacles are so overwhelming, but the bluebirds have met them head on; their perseverance is an example of that in the last 200 years. Of all the obstacles they must face, nesting sites should not be one of them. We can help increase the bluebird success rate by taking the first step, becoming a Landlord to these wonderful birds.

Do you have a question for the next newsletter's Bluebird Advisor? Send it to:

woolwinehouse@gmail.com

AmazonSmile - Donate While You Shop

At last, VBS has an account with AmazonSmile! If you shop on Amazon (and seriously, in the middle of a global pandemic, who hasn't?) Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the charities you select. We hope you'll choose VBS as your charity.

To donate a portion of an Amazon purchase to VBS at no additional cost, [click here to log in](#) or go to amazon.smile.com. If you are using the same device that you use for Amazon, AmazonSmile will open your account, with VBS already selected. If not, you will be asked log in with your Amazon username and password (or create a new account) and then select VBS (Virginia Bluebird Society) as the organization you wish to support. When you place an order, "Supporting: Virginia Bluebird Society" will appear below your order summary.

Each time you shop, remember to begin with AmazonSmile so that your purchases will benefit VBS.



Mark Your Calendars

- September** Clean and winterize boxes, add clean grasses or pine straw, install ventilation plugs
- October 31** **Deadline for submitting TRAIL SUMMARY REPORTS to your County Coordinator. For blank forms or CC email address, contact vbs@virginiabluebirds.org.**
- November 13** 10:00 a.m. **Virginia Bluebird Society annual meeting.** Election of officers and directors, via Zoom. Send email to vbs@virginiabluebirds.org for link to meeting.
- January 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for Spring newsletter
- March 1, 2022** VBS dues increase

Check out our *Facebook* page <https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Bluebird-Society-133048243442687/> for photos and videos throughout the year, and follow us on *Twitter* at https://twitter.com/VA_Bluebirds.

How To Join

Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check for \$10 for an individual with emailed newsletter (\$15 if you prefer a mailed print newsletter) or \$15 for a family with emailed newsletter (\$20 for a print newsletter) to:

Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg VA 22401

Membership forms are available on the VBS web site: <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org>

Send An Article to The Bird Box

We welcome articles and photos from our active VBS members. We want to share our success stories from your home and your trails. Send your original articles, photos, or artwork, or suggest a topic for a future newsletter. Submit materials to Judy Hall, Editor, at birdboxeditor@gmail.com by January 30 to be considered for the spring newsletter. Please include your county, and for photos, identification of people and birds, and name of photographer.



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