

The Bird Box

Spring 2015 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org

Nest Cams

In prior issues we have reported on Nest Cams being placed in schools. In the Summer 2013 issue we reported that 19 Nest Cams were in operation. Now we have 29. In this issue, we are including two articles on how these Nest Cams have been received. Enjoy!

Western Branch Intermediate School, Chesapeake

Article by Kim Hogan, Grade 5 Teacher

Our nest cam was installed the day before we left for spring break, 2014. On the Monday after spring break, we watched through the window as bluebirds, sparrows, and Carolina chickadees checked out the new house. Over the break, one of those species had built a beautiful nest of moss and soft materials.

On Tuesday, the Carolina chickadees were sitting on three eggs, then four, then five! The camera fed into our computer lab and the image was displayed all day on the 5 ft by 6 ft screen. Over 700 children saw this. Teachers were just as excited as kids. The nest cam was the talk of the school. The students would just stand or sit and watch the birds.

As the babies began to hatch, the kids were so excited. We were able to see the parents passing meal worms to one another, and then eventually, stuffing them down the babies' throats. The kids would applaud. Each morning my homeroom kids would perform chickadee checks by stopping by the lab, peeking in on the birds' progress, and then coming to class. Four out of the five eggs hatched.

It was REMARKABLE how fast they grew. One Friday we left, and when we got back on Monday, they suddenly had feathers. Shortly after that, they fledged. We watched them every day. During our bathroom break, the kids grabbed binoculars (we had enough for everyone) and we bird-watched out of the windows across from our classroom.

I cleaned out the nest box and left for summer break. Over the summer I got a phone call from our secretary...We had nesting bluebirds! She witnessed the nest building and the upbringing. She confirmed seeing at least three babies fledging. WOW!



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Western Branch Intermediate School, Chesapeake

Article by Kim Hogan, Grade 5 Teacher (Continued from Page 1)

I cannot accurately convey what this experience meant to me and to the children so I have included quotes from the students in a memory book they gave me before we left for the summer. It will also help explain what activities we did in support of the nest cam. In addition to watching the bluebirds we were treated to yellow-rumped warblers and robins migrating. The warblers were show-offs buzzing the windows and doing fancy flying right in front of the kids. Our resident red-tailed hawk took to sitting on a light pole about twenty feet from our window. On our bus loop, the bluebirds nested in the doggie "poop n scoop" bag holder...before we could install the nest box! We tracked the different species and graphed them for fun.

In response to the question, "What is something you did or learned this year that you will remember for the rest of your life?" This is what two of them had to say:

"I have to say, I have learned a lot this year. There are so many wonderful memories that I can't imagine explaining all of them. The one thing though, that truly sticks out in my mind, was the birds. They are beautiful and wondrous creatures. They truly are fascinating. I fell in love with different types of birds the second we started researching them. I can't imagine life without birds right now. When you set up the bluebird nest cam, I was so excited. It was so neat watching the baby birds grow up into strong birds. I want to thank you for bringing these magnificent animals into my life." K.S.

"Thank you so much for teaching me this year. I loved seeing the really cool birds and the nests. I will never forget the bluebird nest cam. I loved how we named the mama bird, Virginia, the father bird, James, and the babies after presidents. The nest cam was amazing. Learning how to identify birds has helped me to learn how much I love them." A.G.

I have a whole book of memories like these. What the VBS has done to promote the bluebirds, and in our case, many different kinds of birds, is just priceless. VBS has helped foster 28 new bird watchers and a school full of nest cam fans. Each student in my class picked a bird found in Virginia to research and then to create a PowerPoint on that bird. The culminating event was an Earth Day presentation of the PowerPoint presentations and a hallway covered with the accompanying bird projects. It was beautiful as well as educational.

To the VBS: Thank you so very much, on behalf of all of us at Western Branch Intermediate.

Photos by Vickie Fuquay



Woolwine Elementary School

Article by Katie Slusher, Grade 4 Teacher

Woolwine Elementary's pair of bluebirds was very active last year in our nest box! The students, staff and community members watched the entire nesting process on the nest box cam from the female making her nest, to egg laying, to hatching, feeding and fledging of five babies.

My 4th grade students kept a "Bluebird Activity Log" during the nesting cycle which was graded, at the end of the Habitats Unit, on daily reporting accuracy. Just a few weeks after the babies fledged, the bluebird pair constructed a new nest and laid another five eggs. Unfortunately, an invasive bird destroyed these eggs and the bluebirds moved to another nesting site over the summer.

Our nest box opening was "plugged" after the nesting season because no one would be monitoring the boxes. We are now getting ready to unplug the nest box and will keep an eye out for the bluebirds to arrive.

Our school community thoroughly enjoyed watching the nesting process last year and is looking forward to this year's nesting season. We thank the Virginia Bluebird Society for this learning opportunity and Christine Boran for watching over our nest box!

God's Small Creatures

Article by Dottie Haley, Henry County Coordinator

I live about two miles from Chatmoss Country Club and have driven past it frequently for many years. Those first 25 years, I hardly even noticed the nesting boxes clearly visible from the road. Now, each time I pass, I can't help wondering what is going on inside each little box.

Four years ago, I became interested in becoming a bluebird nest box monitor. My Master Naturalist chapter was invited to attend a nest box monitoring training class given by Vickie Fuquay on March 3, 2011. During that training, I met Mr. Jimmy Doyle, coordinator for Henry County, who gave me an orientation to the Chatmoss Country Club's nest box trail the following week.

During my orientation we found a couple of boxes that had partial nests but all of the other boxes remained empty. The next week, there were more boxes with partial nests and some with complete nests. It was exciting to see all of the bluebird activity taking place. The monitoring round on March 24 was wonderful. I got to see my first eggs and by April 6, there was a bluebird explosion - a total of 42 eggs among 13 boxes; I was hooked! Now, as my fourth season of nest box monitoring approaches, I am still amazed to see the miracle that takes place inside those boxes each spring. I consider monitoring my way of doing a small part in the conservation effort.

I was quite enthusiastic last year when I put boxes up at my place of employment and found four other people who wanted to help monitor the boxes. It is very rewarding to introduce someone else to the world of bluebirds and experience their amazement during that first nesting.

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

E-mail your materials to Doug Rogers.

President's Message

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership and/or made a donation to VBS! If you haven't had a chance to show your support for bluebird conservation, membership information and the VBS mailing address can be found on the last page of this newsletter and online at www.virginiabluebirds.org. In addition to relying on your financial support, VBS is a volunteer organization and needs your time and talent. If you would like to find out more about volunteer opportunities, including Board positions, please contact me. Elections for two-year Board positions will be held at the fall meeting. If you would like to serve as a local point of contact, or County Coordinator, please contact Christine Boran, VBS State Coordinator.

The 2014 trail data is included in this newsletter and can be viewed on the website as well. Thank you to Ann Dunn for taking on the job as Data Manager. Monitoring our bluebird boxes and keeping good records is one of the most important and enjoyable things that we do as bluebirders. With regular monitoring, we can intervene when problems arise, such as ants, wasps or even snakes. In one instance, a monitor on a local trail saved a nestling when upon opening a box, she found a small snake that had somehow navigated the snake guard and consumed the other nestlings. We also keep the nest boxes reserved for native birds by removing house sparrow nests.

Careful monitoring and reporting data also allows us to compare how the birds are faring over time. As I write this, I have not had the opportunity to see the statewide statistics, but I know here in Fairfax County, 2014 was not as productive a year as 2013. With data reported for 731 nest boxes, which is 37 more than in 2013, we saw a decline of 576 bluebirds fledged, or 26 percent (2,217 bluebirds fledged in year 2013; 1,641 fledged in year 2014). This is enough to make me sit up and take notice, and maybe even stay awake at night. Overall, we saw a decline of 469 fledglings, or 13 percent. Tree swallows experienced a gain of 120 fledglings, or 14 percent. The decline in bluebird fledglings correlated with a reduction in nest attempts and was experienced across the county.

Where did our bluebirds go? Perhaps it had to do with the weather. I don't have the answer yet, but I do know that our care and monitoring of nest boxes continues to provide a vital enhancement of nesting habitat. As the new nesting seasons nears, we will be checking the boxes for needed repairs, making sure we have monitors lined up, and keeping our fingers crossed for a healthy, productive year 2015 for the bluebirds and all native cavity nesting birds. If you would like to be a bluebird monitor on a VBS trail, please contact your County Coordinator.

Carmen Bishop, President Virginia Bluebird Society

Meet the Monitors: Ron and Priscilla Kingston

Article by Christina Woodson Photo courtesy of Ron and Priscilla Kingston

CW: When did you begin working with bluebirds?

RK&PK: 1977

CW: How did you begin monitoring bluebird trails?

RK&PK: It's kind of a long story; in the beginning as a young boy I built a walk-in cage/loft for my domestic pigeons which included racing, rollers, tumblers and fantails. Being active in this hobby probably piqued my interest in birds and then in the 1970s, Priscilla and I got interested in native wild birds. In 1978, we attended a program on bluebirds at Watkins Regional Park in Maryland. The program was given by Dr. Lawrence Zeleny and Mary Janetatos of the North American Bluebird Society. That's when we really got interested in the conservation of bluebirds. We established trails at Huntley Meadows Park, Sky Meadows State Park and our Springfield Virginia neighborhood.



CW: What is special to you about your trails?

RK&PK: We monitor seven trails in Albemarle County and there is a variety of habitats; some are on manicured lawns and others are reached by wading through tall vegetation.

We try to give the bluebirds a fighting chance to survive and reproduce by practicing good management techniques. If possible, we locate nestboxes in bluebird habitat and use my stovepipe predator guard.

CW: What would you like to share about native cavity-nesting birds?

RK&PK: They all need assistance in reproducing. By the act of being involved in cavity-nesting bird conservation we assist such species as bluebirds, kestrels, owls, Great Crested Flycatchers, Prothonotary Warblers and Purple Martins. Monitoring is a challenging experience, but is very rewarding by watching young birds fledging from the nestboxes.

CW note: Ron Kingston developed the stovepipe guard, which bears his name in 1988. Bluebird enthusiasts all over the country have used the design he pioneered to protect their nest boxes from predators.

VBS Nest Box Activity 2014

Data and charts by Ann Dunn, Data Manager

Data for our statewide nest box trails are in. Details of the results may be found in the attached table. We thank our very dedicated volunteers, who this year monitored 4,838 boxes on 420 trails located in 45 different counties/cities throughout Virginia. A total of 23,574 native cavity nesters fledged from these boxes. The distribution of species is shown in Figure 1. As always, bluebirds (EABL) dominated our trails, accounting for two thirds of the total activity. They were followed by tree swallows (TRSW). The house wrens (HOWR), Carolina chickadees (CACH), titmice and Carolina wrens are all grouped as “All Other.”

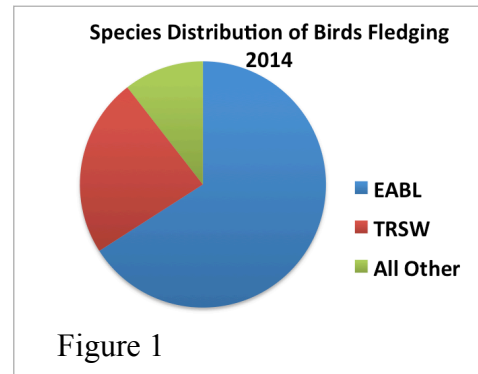


Figure 1

Figure 2 follows the fledging history of three of our cavity nesters over the past ten years. Up until 2014, yearly increases in box numbers were accompanied by increased fledging of both bluebirds and tree swallows. In 2014, however, there was a decided decline in fledging bluebirds. That same year tree swallow production increased slightly while that of house wrens remained essentially unchanged.

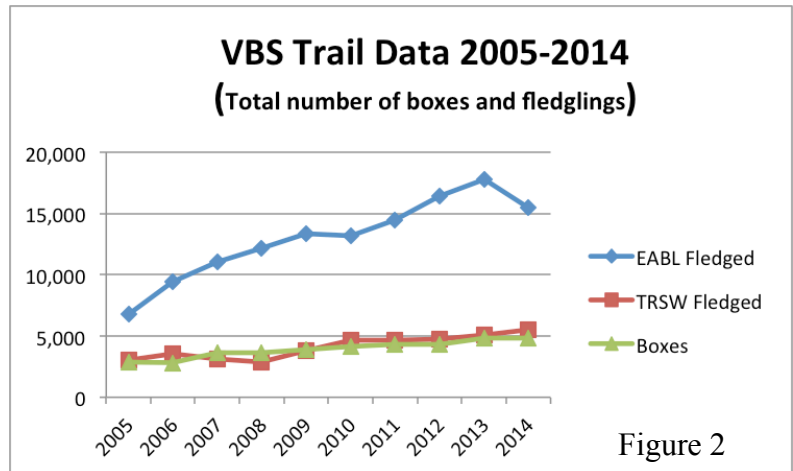


Figure 2

Bluebird nesting activity was examined by several additional parameters for 2014 and compared to the same for 2013 (Figure 3). Bluebird fledglings per box dropped by 14 percent this past year. Box usage, measured as nesting attempts per box, likewise fell (11%). Both clutch size and development of eggs into fledging birds declined only slightly. Together the data for nesting activity suggest a selective species drop in bluebird productivity in 2014. The winter of 2013-2014 was unusually long and harsh and may have caused both a reduction in our local bluebird population and a shortening of its breeding season. Tree swallows and house wrens would have avoided these hazards as they winter in more southerly climes and normally begin egg laying later than bluebirds. We will hope for a return to more seasonable weather conditions in the months to come and with it the restoration of bluebird productivity to levels that we have come to enjoy in the past few years.

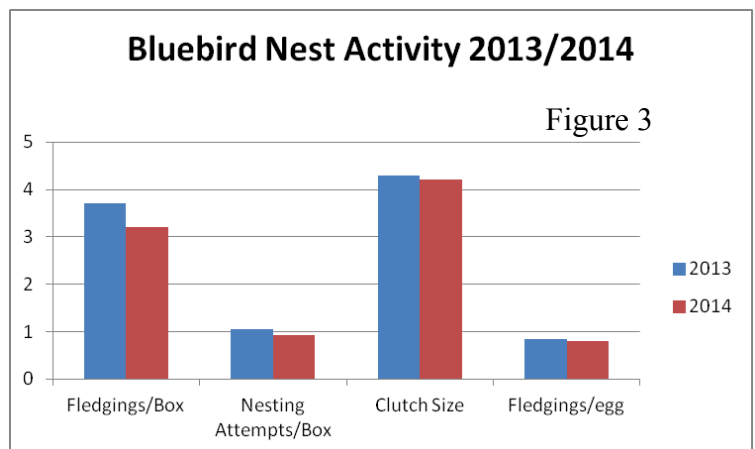


Figure 3

2014 Virginia Bluebird Society State Statistics

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
1					Bluebirds				Tree Swallows				All Other				Total				
2	County	Trail Leader/County Coordinator	Number of Trails	Number of Boxes	Nesting Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Birds fledged per box
3	Albemarle	Dunn, A.	40	492	532	2298	1940	1766	148	705	616	569	33	159	136	127	713	3162	2692	2462	5.00
4	Arlington	Davis-Holland, A	7										11	44	27	26	11	44	27	26	3.71
5	Augusta	King, J.	2	31	26	88	32	22	9	43	10	6	2	6	2	2	37	137	44	30	0.97
6	Botetourt	Evans, T.	9	276	163	595	459	442	170	767	680	660	38	151	131	131	371	1513	1270	1233	4.47
7	Buchanan	Mayhorn, R.	2	40	34	151	141	128	10	42	40	40	1	6	6	6	45	199	187	174	4.35
8	Chesterfield	Hesler, J. & I.	3	65	67	296	276	262	5	23	16	15	3	14	10	10	75	333	302	287	4.42
9	Clarke	Lichliter, K.	1	132	75	315	263	255	120	593	470	415	24	131	84	84	219	1039	817	754	5.71
10	Culpeper	Kitts, S	4	29	19	81	71	71	19	75	59	49	0	0	0	0	38	156	130	120	4.14
11	Fairfax	Bishop, C.	60	731	504	2038	1709	1641	271	1281	1071	987	157	690	560	538	932	4009	3340	3166	4.33
12	Fauquier	Webster, M.	1	74	65	269	238	236	33	174	148	145	0	0	0	0	98	443	386	381	5.15
13	Floyd	Boran, C.	3	12	19	87	74	68	3	14	14	13	1	6	6	6	23	107	94	87	7.25
14	Fluvanna	Tyler, F.	2	9	7	28	25	25	7	19	16	16	0	0	0	0	14	47	41	41	4.56
15	Fredericks. City	Little, Anne	2	21	20	95	73	72					2	10	10	9	22	105	83	81	3.86
16	Giles	Opengari, B.	1	14	12	53	48	44	4	19	12	12	0	0	0	0	16	72	60	56	4.00
17	Gloucester	Walker, W.	4	22	20	74	63	63					3	19	19	19	23	93	82	82	3.73
18	Goochland	Dalton, J.	1	3	3	11	5	5					0	0	0	0	3	11	5	5	1.67
19	Grayson	Kerns, D.&L.	3	28	28	112	91	81	11	51	43	43	3	15	15	15	42	178	149	139	4.96
20	Greene	Wilczek, P.&F.	3	60	65	284	238	224	16	82	71	63	3	15	15	15	84	381	324	302	5.03
21	Halifax	Fuquay	5	43	79	354	296	286	13	58	39	39	5	20	17	17	97	432	352	342	7.95
22	Henrico	Woodson, Christina	5	49	29	110	88	81	0	0	0	0	27	95	75	68	56	205	163	149	3.04
23	Henry	Haley, D.	8	221	372	1580	1388	1324	6	24	20	20	4	9	9	9	382	1613	1417	1353	6.12
24	James City	Lockwood/Ullman	7	148	141	625	534	521					12	54	40	40	153	679	574	561	3.79
25	Lancaster	Boundy, P	3	82	96	401	378	358	2	8	6	6	9	44	38	38	107	453	422	402	4.90
26	Loudoun	Locklear, J.	38	452	334	1415	1176	1130	226	1027	944	917	81	310	253	220	641	2752	2373	2267	5.02
27	Louisa	Tyler, F.	2	14	5	21	17	17					3	9	9	5	8	30	26	22	1.57
28	Madison	Squire, D.	3	39	33	135	132	118	18	88	83	77	2	12	10	9	53	235	225	204	5.23
29	Montgomery	Pfeiffer, S.	2	25	17	72	54	49	18	85	63	61	0	0	0	0	35	157	117	110	4.40
30	Nelson	Davis, P./Colgate A	11	136	135	608	571	546	48	233	221	203	6	38	31	23	189	879	823	772	5.68
31	Orange	McMillie, P.	5	56	36	146	119	121	15	58	47	35	13	68	46	39	64	272	212	195	3.48
32	Patrick	Boran, C.	3	49	69	309	221	208	4	18	13	12	12	60	38	38	85	387	272	258	5.27
33	Pittsylvania	Fuquay, V.	130	574	660	2843	2567	2454	76	384	340	318	72	350	308	302	808	3577	3215	3074	5.36
34	Powhatan	Witt, T.	1	8	7	30	28	28					5	22	22	22	12	52	50	50	6.25
35	Prince William	Swanson/Hindman	13	198	157	667	601	584	55	251	221	186	35	158	136	118	247	1076	958	888	4.48
36	Rappahannock	Patterson, B.	4	45	40	144	104	70					14	62	53	20	54	206	157	90	2.00
37	Richmond	Narney, P.	1	24	17	81	58	55					0	0	0	0	17	81	58	55	2.29
38	Richmond City	Woodson, C.	6	52	30	127	120	113	5	17	14	13	28	114	86	76	63	258	220	202	3.88
39	Roanoke	Morris, E.	12	261	263	1166	952	874	113	546	466	412	56	287	242	227	432	1999	1660	1513	5.80
40	Rockbridge	Kvech, S.	3	36	14	60	47	31	2	9	6	6	20	95	59	44	36	164	112	81	2.25
41	Rockingham	Harrison, D.	1	7	6	25	24	24	2	8	8	8	1	6	4	4	9	39	36	36	5.14
42	Shenandoah	Harrison, D.	1	4	7	26	23	22	3	10	6	6	0	0	0	0	10	36	29	28	7.00
43	Spotsylvania	Hamb, J.	2	48	55	231	187	174	8	44	38	38	27	117	95	87	90	392	320	299	6.23
44	Stafford	Little, Anne	5	39	37	159	143	137	12	57	49	49	7	28	26	26	56	244	218	212	5.44
45	Warren	Swanson, B.	2	75	82	341	236	205	32	175	129	116	9	40	26	26	123	556	391	347	4.63
46	Westmoreland	Narney, J.	2	65	89	378	313	294	4	20	16	16	0	0	0	0	93	398	329	310	4.77
47	York	Lockwood/Ullman	5	88	79	352	300	281					13	66	57	47	92	418	357	328	3.73
48	TOTALS		425	4877	4548	19281	16423	15510	1488	7008	5995	5571	742	3330	2701	2493	6778	29619	25119	23574	4.83

Mark Your Calendar

Reminder: Begin monitoring nest boxes by April 1 and continue through August, or until nesting has concluded, and then report your data to your County Coordinator, or directly to Ann Dunn, State Data Manager, if you don't have a County Coordinator.

Stafford County Bluebird Meeting, Sunday, March 15, 1:00 p.m., Fredericksburg. Contact Anne Little for details, thegate@cox.net

Earth Day Celebration, Saturday, April 18, 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Old Mill Park, Downtown Fredericksburg

Bluebird Presentation by Earl Morris, Tuesday, April 21, Presbyterian Church Seniors Luncheon, Salem. Contact Earl Morris for details, emorris@ntelos.net

Eagle Festival, Saturday, April 25, 10 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Mason Neck State Park

Purple Martin Field Day, Saturday, June 27, 10:00 a.m., Louisa County

How To Join

Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check for \$10 for an individual with e-mailed Newsletter (\$15 for print Newsletter) or \$15 for a family with e-mailed Newsletter (\$20 for a print Newsletter) to:
Membership forms are available on the VBS website: <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org>

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