

The Bird Box Bird Box

Spring 2018 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org

Outstanding Members Receive Awards at VBS Biannual Fall Conference

Submitted by Anne Little, Awards Committee

Four Virginia Bluebird Society members were recognized at our fall conference for their outstanding contributions to bluebirding. The **Bluebirder of the Year** award is given to the individual who promotes bluebirds through outreach to schools and community groups and promotes good bluebird management techniques. **Mike Bishop** is a retiree who lives and breathes nature. He is a Virginia Master Naturalist and runs five different bluebird trails in Fairfax County, accounting for over 100 boxes. He is an independent, reliable force, making sure that these boxes are taken

care of on a regular basis. In addition to bluebirds, Mike is also very active in the Purple Martin Initiative, Prothonotary Warblers, and bat boxes. Mike is a great asset to bluebirds, to VBS, and to the natural world.

The **Volunteer of the Year** for VBS is a person who has given a lot of time and energy to help VBS grow and flourish. **Phil Kenny** has served on the VBS Board of Directors and has worked



Mike Bishop receiving Bluebirder of the Year, presented by Cathy Hindman

on *The Bird Box* since the beginning of VBS. Phil also maintains our online data base and helps manage online communications with our membership. Phil manages five separate trails in Fairfax and has installed boxes for Great Crested Flycatchers and other cavity nesters. Phil's work with other cavity nesters brings cross-fertilization and multiple species effort to VBS. Phil is a long-time VBS volunteer and is well deserving of this award.

The **County Coordinator of the Year** is given in memory of Barbara Chambers and the energy and inspiration she brought to bluebird conservation. This award is given to a county coordinator who goes the extra mile to further bluebird conservation in their county. **Steve Johnson** is the Fairfax County coordinator. He has really embraced the position and brought to it great enthusiasm, energy, hard work, wisdom, and humility. Fairfax has approximately 60 trails, most with multiple monitors, so there are many people involved.



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Phil Kenny receiving Coordinator of the Year, presented by Cathy Hindman

Photos by Doug Rogers

Outstanding Members Receive Awards at VBS Biannual Fall Conference, continued



Steve Johnson receiving Coordinator Award from Cathy Hindman



Ann Dunn receiving the VBS Heritage Award, presented by Cathy Hindman

Steve sends out helpful and timely emails, holds training sessions, finds new monitors, and helps with box building and trail maintenance. Steve is the Energizer bunny of County Coordinators.

The **Heritage Award** is not given every year by VBS. We wait to give this award when we have a special person who needs recognition. **Ann Dunn** has been a bluebird monitor in Albemarle County for many years. She quietly and effectively goes above and beyond her county coordinator data collection duties by promoting VBS, inspiring people to become bluebird monitors, motivating current monitors, and personally helping monitors in any way she can. Ann has served on our board of directors for many years and gathers and records all of the data for VBS statewide. We owe Ann a debt of gratitude for all of her passion and dedication to bluebirds.

Virginia Bluebird Society Biannual Fall Conference 2017



Top left: Pattie Reum and Dan Bieker talk about the Kestrel Project.



Top right: Many organizations provided information in displays, including our own VBS.



Bottom left: Bob Schamerhorn shared his "Gardening For Birds" experience

Bottom right: Lexi and Anne prepare items for the raffle and door prizes.

Photos contributed by Doug Rogers, VBS Board Member



Virginia Bluebird Society Nest Box Activity 2017

By Ann D. Dunn, VBS Data Manager

Reports on the 2017 breeding activity of our cavity nesters have come in from 49 counties and cities throughout Virginia. The 420 trails and their 4766 nest boxes produced 24,631 fledging birds. Distribution by species was as follows: bluebirds 66%, tree swallows 23%, Carolina chickadees and house wrens respectively 5% and “others” 1% (tufted titmice and Carolina wrens). Details of the results may be found on the attached table. The good news is that after several disappointing years (2014 and 2015), 2017 continued the improving trend of 2016 and gave us a very active season, especially for bluebirds.

From 2015 to 2017, nesting survival (percent of eggs developing into fledging birds) increased for both species; bluebirds 79% to 84%, tree swallows 74% to 76%.

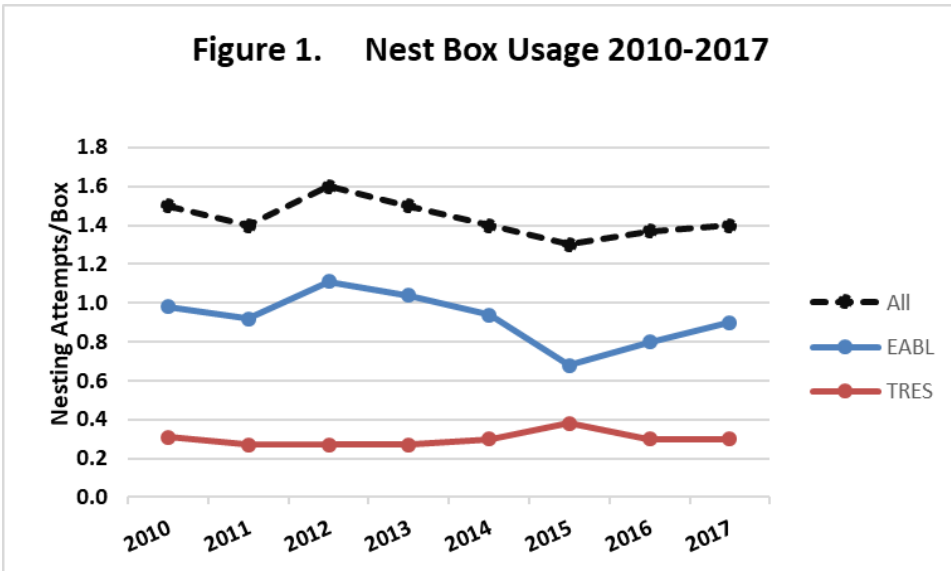
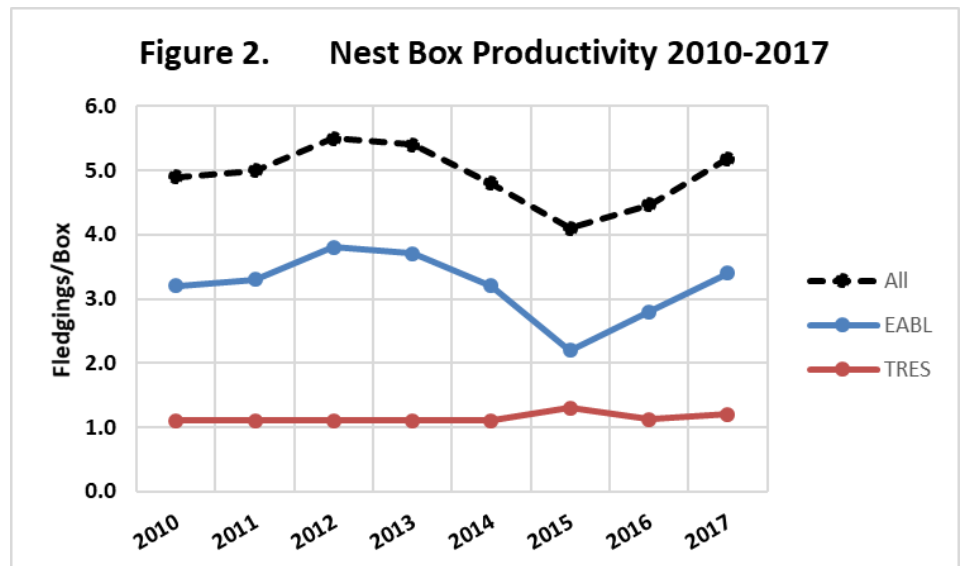


Figure 1 follows the use of nest boxes (Nesting Attempts/Box) from years 2010-2017. It shows a 30% increase in 2017 from the nadir year of 2015 for bluebirds, but a slight decrease for tree swallows.

Figure 2 follows the overall nest box productivity (fledglings/box) during the years 2010-2017). Increased nesting attempts and improved nesting survival for bluebirds increased their overall nesting productivity from 2015 to 2017 by 50%. Little or no change occurred for tree swallows during that period.



Much of the success for bluebirds this past season can probably be attributed to weather conditions. Winter 2017 was unusually mild, so we can propose that our Virginia native bluebird breeding population fared well, entering the early spring in robust condition and beginning the breeding season in timely fashion, before the tree swallows arrived on the scene. Weather data is incomplete for the state as a whole, but if Albemarle/Fluvanna are any indication, the summer was temperate enough to allow for multiple successful nestings for our bluebirds. We will have to see how they fare this season. Will the unusually cold stretch occurring in late December/early January have an effect on breeding vigor?

Many thanks to all our wonderful trail monitors who contributed their data for this report.

County	Trail Leader/County Coordinator	Number of Trails	Number of Boxes	Bluebirds				Chickadees				Tree Swallows				House Wrens				Other				All	Birds fledged per Box			
				Nesting Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Fledged					
1 Albemarle	Dunn, A.	38	439	515	2222	1932	1800	25	111	81	75	149	653	506	469	20	95	94	92	3	13	10	10	712	3094	2623	2446	5.6
2 Arlington	Davis-Holland, A	4	16	2	10	10	0	3	17	11	11	2	9	0	0	3	18	18	16					10	54	39	27	1.7
3 Bedford	Henricks, D.	1	13	10	47	41	40	1	4	3	0	1	5	4	4									12	56	48	44	3.4
4 Botetourt	Bob&Brenda Meyers	1	20	19	84	68	68	4	10	9	9	9	29	25	25	2	10	10	10					34	133	112	112	5.6
5 Buchanan	Mayhorn, R.	3	61	35	151	141	137	1	6	6	6	15	69	67	65									51	226	214	208	3.4
6 Chesterfield	Hesler, J. & I.	3	61	57	240	228	225	13	62	60	53													70	302	288	278	4.6
7 Clarke	Lichter, K.	1	132	72	305	245	226					132	655	466	410	6	33	26	22					210	993	737	658	5.0
8 Culpeper	Kitts, S	5	39	25	115	107	98	1	5	4	4	26	126	120	118	1	5	5	5					53	251	236	225	5.8
9 Fairfax	Johnson, S.	58	727	504	2123	1759	1684	57	251	182	174	299	1358	1148	1067	111	498	430	396					991	4291	3570	3367	4.6
10 Fauquier	Demnee, Barbara	4	147	62	425	353	307	6	30	21	21	77	399	295	290	7	34	18	15					169	927	718	664	4.5
11 Floyd	Boran, C.	2	12	12	51	43	37					10	39	30	28									22	90	73	65	5.4
12 Fluvanna	Dunn, A.	2	60	51	230	192	189	7	39	37	37	16	65	59	52									74	334	288	278	4.6
13 Franklin	Boran, C.	2	16	19	100	88	85	1	4	4	4	1	5	5	5									21	109	97	94	5.9
14 Fredericks City	Little, Anne	5	49	31	142	123	114	4	24	18	18	29	132	93	71	2	11	11	11					66	309	245	214	4.4
15 Giles	Opengari, B.	1	6	8	15	12	10					3	15	12	12									11	30	24	22	3.7
16 Gloucester	Walker, W.	4	35	25	88	87	87	7	29	25	25	5	25	25	25									37	142	137	137	3.9
17 Grayson	Kerns, D. & L.	3	28	31	122	102	96					14	66	43	37	4	20	16	16					49	208	161	149	5.3
18 Greene	Wilczek, P. & F.	4	74	92	390	354	336	9	55	50	45	16	75	62	61	2	10	10	10					119	530	476	452	6.1
19 Halifax	Fuquay, Vickie	5	52	53	225	191	182	4	20	16	12	20	90	80	73									77	335	287	267	5.1
20 Hanover	Dorgan/Phillips	3	22	22	78	69	64	2	10	3	3													1	4	4	4	3.2
21 Henrico	Woodson, Christina	6	75	60	243	206	194	19	91	72	70	2	10	8	8	16	51	44	43					98	401	336	319	4.3
22 Henry	Haley, D.	9	247	420	1789	1755	1716	6	19	15	14	3	11	11	11	9	17	17	17					441	1850	1810	1770	7.2
23 Highland	Bell, Sarah	4	43	19	80	54	48	1	7	7	7	23	126	114	106	6	33	32	31					49	246	207	192	4.5
24 Isle of Wright Co	Langdon, L.	3	52	84	376	321	317	3	13	5	5	4	18	8	8	2	10	10	10					93	417	344	340	6.5
25 James City	Lockwood/Ullman	10	189	171	744	656	617	20	110	100	91	1	3	0	0	8	43	43	43					213	949	845	793	4.2
26 King George	Taft, Becky	2	29	38	165	163	157	1	2	2	2													39	167	165	159	5.5
27 Lancaster	Boundy, P	1	21	21	90	75	70	2	9	9	8													24	104	89	83	4.0
28 Loudoun	Etten, K.	27	324	195	854	738	709	8	12	3	3	214	952	838	816	39	149	123	122					458	1977	1712	1660	5.1
29 Lynchburg City	Lloyd, K.	1	9	6	29	23	23					2	10	9	9									8	39	32	32	3.6
30 Madison	Squire, D.	3	45	47	170	153	147	4	20	20	16	13	61	56	54									64	251	229	217	4.8
31 Montgomery	Weber, S.	6	84	33	139	99	91	3	15	15	15	78	353	267	235	15	85	69	64					129	592	450	405	4.8
32 Nelson	Colgate A	7	93	78	330	290	258	6	26	15	15	27	128	122	114	5	27	27	27					116	511	454	414	4.5
33 Northumberland	D&L Adams	4	34	46	186	172	166	4	14	10	4													50	200	182	170	5.0
34 Orange	Cris Browning	5	42	60	265	202	194	5	18	15	15	9	28	19	19	2	11	10	10					76	322	246	238	5.7
35 Patrick	Boran, C.	3	60	94	417	380	360	4	20	18	18	9	36	29	29									107	473	427	407	6.8
36 Pittsylvania	Fuquay, V.	130	615	757	3385	3071	3022	38	199	168	162	153	775	677	617	30	162	140	134					984	4544	4078	3957	6.4
37 Powhatan	Witt, T.	2	24	22	98	91	86	6	31	31	28	3	13	13	13	4	18	18	18					35	160	153	145	6.0
38 Pulaski	Opengari, B.	1	10	11	44	42	39	1	6	6	6	5	24	19	14									17	74	67	59	5.9
39 Prince William	C.Hindman/V. Gaffney	13	219	200	845	740	639	11	57	52	52	101	445	345	328	22	82	73	73					336	1439	1220	1102	5.0
40 Rappahannock	Patterson, B.	6	56	36	152	114	96	15	74	61	30	5	24	20	20	8	39	39	38					64	289	234	184	3.3
41 Richmond City	Woodson, C.	5	76	73	298	248	241	3	14	12	10	4	18	11	11	1	6	0	0					81	336	271	262	3.4
42 Rockingham	Harrison, D.	1	7	8	24	18	15					6	29	15	11	2	7	5	5					16	60	38	31	4.4
43 Roanoke Co	Earl Morris	3	63	79	370	324	298	4	20	17	17	15	74	67	64									98	464	408	379	6.0
44 Shenandoah	Harrison, D.	1	5	7	30	24	24	24				2	6	5	5									9	36	29	29	5.8
45 Spotsylvania	Hamb, J.	2	45	28	115	92	92	3	15	9	9	13	49	41	41	12	63	56	55					56	242	198	197	4.4
46 Stafford	Little, Anne	4	35	21	83	83	81	4	21	21	20	11	52	47	48	3	11	11	11					39	167	162	160	4.6
47 Warren	Morrison, C.	2	77	61	271	190	171	5	24	15	15	48	244	188	164	10	51	43	34					124	590	436	384	5.0
48 Westmoreland	Narney, J.	3	71	77	341	310	299	4	22	22	22	14	62	48	47									97	432	385	373	5.3
49 York	Lockwood/Ullman	7	107	85	380	330	317	14	67	39	38	0	0	0	0	4	23	18	18					107	491	407	392	3.7
Totals (as of 2/3/2018)*		420	4766	4482	19476	17109	16272	339	1603	1289	1189	1589	7366	6017	5604	344	1565	1359	1290	87	319	289	276	6841	30329	26063	24631	5.2

It's That ONE Bluebird

By Christine Boran

Woolwine House Bluebird Trail, Patrick County

My bluebird trail is starting its 10th year in 2018. With each year naturally there has been an increase in nesting boxes and thus fledged baby birds. This is always a celebration. It is enjoyable to see the increase in fledged birds as each nesting season closes. However, during last year's nesting season, I was reminded that my biggest satisfaction in bluebirding is not the quantity of birds that fledge, it is knowing that my care as a monitor can help just one nestling in a distressed scenario. Every year, there is at least one individual case that proves to me why I still want to help them by monitoring the nest boxes. At the trail's Box #1, I had a happy hatching of five bluebirds. All was normal until the second week after hatching, when the young were at age 10 days. I noticed a strange behavioral change in them. They were not hunkered down "we are incognito - you don't see us here" like they should at that age. That immediately startled me enough to investigate further. All five were standing on the nest and acting odd, as if there were an attack on the nest; they had no fear of my presence. One was holding itself up on the wall and gaping. I carefully closed the box but promised myself I would come back the following morning to check them. The next day, two had died on the nest. The three remaining live young appeared to be getting feathered normally and were not gaping, so I ruled out blowfly larvae infestation. I removed the two dead young and inspected them, looking for blowfly welts or any clue of cause of death, and found nothing. I sat inside my car with binoculars waiting to see if Mom and Pop would come to feed the three remaining. I saw no parent activity in the hour I sat there. I decided to finish the rest of my trail and come back later that day and check again. When I returned, two more had died on the nest. One live baby bluebird remained. Without thinking further, I determined the nest was abandoned (both parents went missing, assumed killed) and those babies starved to death. Using what I had on hand, I got my emergency kit together to move the surviving orphan to another nest box on my large trail. I created a donut shaped nest with rolled paper towels and tissues. I placed that inside a medium size brown paper bag, and carefully picked up the baby from the nest and put it inside the bag on the tissues. I verified from my trail notebook that Box #16 had five baby bluebirds at 13 days old. I drove over to that location and added the lone surviving 11-day old bluebird to the nest of the five bluebird young. The great news about this box was that it was the larger floored Two-Hole Mansion, which meant the nest size was wider and could accommodate the orphan comfortably without crowding them. The parent birds at the Box #16 Two-Hole Mansion fostered the "new kid on the block" without question and all six baby bluebirds fledged! How wonderful the parent birds are to take in an orphan as if it were their own. As a bluebird monitor, I will never forget the joy I felt knowing I could help at this time of crisis. That's what this is all about for me - not crunching numbers at the end of the nesting season to see if I increased fledged birds from one year over another. No. It's just that ONE baby bluebird that does!



Orphaned baby bluebird



Moving the surviving orphan to another nest box

Photos by Christine Boran

Feeding Bluebirds: Homemade Bluebird Banquet and Suet Cakes

By Elizabeth Keim

Bluebird Coordinator, Mecklenburg County

We had six bluebirds during the snow on January 17. I had put out bunches of mealworms and homemade suet cakes. They worked on the worms and suet cakes until the snow melted, camped out in one of the bird houses, and are still checking out the mealworms and suet cakes daily. They are not as voracious since the snow melted, but still like those homemade suet cakes.

Here are two of my favorite recipes for feeding bluebirds:

SUET CAKES - A recipe for the birds!

1 lb. CHEAP lard, melted
2 cups CHEAP chunky peanut butter, melted
2 lbs CHEAP corn meal
1 cup CHEAP old fashioned oats (optional)
1 QUART or more mixed bird seed, plus 2 cups for coating

Melt the lard and peanut butter.

Combine meal, oats and 1 qt. bird seed in a large mixing bowl. Pour in melted lard/peanut butter. Mix well. You may need to add more bird seed if mixture is too moist. Sprinkle another cup of mixed bird seed on the bottom of a 9 x 13" Pam'ed or oiled casserole dish. Pour mixture over bird seed. Pat down to compact. Sprinkle another cup of bird seed on top and pat into mixture. Chill for 2-3 hours. Slice into 6 squares. Hang one square in suet feeder. Wrap remaining squares in waxed paper, place in a gallon zip-lock bag and freeze. Cakes should be over an inch thick and about 4x5."

Six commercial cakes cost up to \$8.00. BUT the birds will eat this and leave the commercial cakes. (Approximate cost of these - \$3.00 -\$4.00)

Bluebird Banquet Recipe

From Linda Janilla Peterson

Bluebird Banquet is available commercially at *The Wild Bird Specialists - Audubon Workshop*

MIX:

1 cup chunky peanut butter
4 cups yellow corn meal
1 cup unbleached or whole wheat flour

ADD:

1 cup fine sunflower chips or whole seeds
1 cup peanut hearts (or finely ground nuts or chunky peanut butter)
1/2—1 cup Zante currants or raisins cut in halves)

DRIZZLE AND STIR IN:

1 cup rendered melted suet or lard

COOL

Resulting mix will be crumbly and should have bean/pea sized lumps from the drizzling of the melted suet. If too sticky after cooling, mix in a bit more flour. If too dry, drizzle in more melted suet.

Refrigerate any mix you are not using, to prevent suet from turning rancid. I use a commercial pure bird suet cake. You can render your own suet. Grind or cube butcher store suet. Melt over low heat. Watch carefully as suet is a fat and can start on fire with too high heat. A microwave can be used. Strain out the stringy bits (cracklings). Cool. Melt a second time for the recipe.

Note: The food mix is meant to be a dietary supplement to a healthy, free ranging bird. The food is NOT sufficient to be a complete diet. It is also not meant to be a food for abandoned nestlings.



Mixed Nest in Fairfax County Nest Box

Trail monitor Pat Rentz took this photo of a mixed nest in a box that is part of the Virginia Bluebird Society Trail in Fountainhead Regional Park in Fairfax County. Both bluebirds hatched, but unfortunately only one fledged along with the five tree swallows, and most likely did not make it without bluebird parents.

Editor's note: Feathers are typical of tree swallow nests

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www.virginiabluebirds.org

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If you have a new email address, or have recently changed it, please let us know.

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

Remembering Sandy Bratton, 1942-2018

By Sara Simpson Bell

Not very many folks passing through Highland and Bath counties fail to notice the many bluebird boxes and cheerful daffodils that bloom beneath those boxes in the warm spring sun. That's the kind of thing Sandy liked to do – spread cheer and goodwill throughout our rural community. When she died suddenly on February 25, she left a legacy of warmth and kindness that will not be forgotten. Sandy was one of those soft-spoken, determined women that can make things happen and make a difference.

Sandy was instrumental, along with the help of YuLee Larner, in organizing and presiding over the Bath-Highland

Bird Club. Her enthusiasm was contagious and the club grew under her guidance. She was especially happy to be out in the wilds of Bath and Highland counties birding with companions. As much as she loved all birds (and trees) Sandy had a real soft spot for bluebird stewardship. She formed partnerships with other birders and a local nest box builder, Fred Frye, to establish a trail that ran from Monterey into Bath County. She helped put up nest boxes and encouraged monitoring everywhere, eventually taking the role of Coordinator for the two counties. Local school children and garden clubs benefited from her creative bluebird presentations. She also often made gifts of installing personalized nest boxes to celebrate new babies, recovery from illness, or any other reason that would make someone smile.

In her personal life and her career with Social Services, Sandy reached out to everyone that needed a hand and gave it. She made life better for many people – and bluebirds. Her smile, her wisdom and her love will be greatly missed.



The Bluebird Advisor

By Anne Little and Christine Boran



Dear Bluebird Advisor,

We have a question on a common monitoring problem. Sometimes, the adult bird will not leave the nest, so the monitor cannot see the eggs or chicks, so they don't record any observation on the field log form. This creates difficulty later when we are interpreting the notes and entries to determine what happened in that nest and the final results. Do you have a suggestion on how we should monitor the box when the bird won't move off? We want to give our monitors the best advice to handle this situation. Missing information makes it very hard to make a determination of the results on those nest boxes.

Any advice would be appreciated.

Thanks,

Margaret @Sky Meadows Bluebird Trail

Dear Margaret,

This happens to me sometimes. I smile and feel proud of that mama bluebird for being protective of her clutch! leave her be and try again another day. Monitors should never force a female off her nest. I like to remind monitors to give advance notice when approaching a nest box; talk softly, whistle lightly...to give the mom bird a chance to flush off on her own, if she chooses, before opening the box. Also, I recommend trying not to monitor boxes in the early mornings when egg laying takes place or brooding the hatchlings is common, especially in early spring when it is colder in the mornings. I find the female likes to leave the nest during late mornings and during the afternoon after laying and during incubation to take a break--to stretch out and find something to eat. Not to worry--If counting an egg clutch cannot happen that week and the monitor cannot return with a few days, a count can still take place the following week on the next nest box check, even after hatching takes place, by counting the live young on the nest. I just update my notebook records of the final count before fledging takes place. The tree swallows also will stay on the nest, even more than the bluebirds. I apply the same protocol.

The Bluebird Advisor

Send your questions to vbs@virginiabluebirds.org

Mark Your Calendars

- April 1** Nest box monitoring, no foolin’
- March 10** VBS Board Meeting, 10:00 am in Charlottesville, Location TBD, email Cathy Hindman. All county coordinators are invited.
- May 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for summer newsletter

Check out our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Bluebird-Society-133048243442687/> for photos and videos throughout the year.

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 for 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 carjuwa@hotmail.com by May 30 to be considered for the summer newsletter.



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