

**Virginia
Bluebird
Society**

The Bird Box

Summer 2008

Calendar

September: Tally your trail data and send it to your county coordinator. Mail it to Charlie Chambers if you have no County Coordinator.

September 19-21: Eastern Shore Birding & Wildlife Festival in Cape Charles. Details on the Web site: www.esvachamber.org/festivals/birding/index.html. Keynote address and special guest is Pete Dunne of Cape May Bird Observatory.

November 1: Fall VBS meeting, 10 a.m.- 12 noon at Northern Shenandoah Audubon Festival, 1001 East Cork St., Winchester. At 1:15, Brian Swanson will do a bluebird presentation.

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.

2007 Nest Box Results

The results of the analysis of the state-wide data from the 2007 nesting season show a substantial increase in the number of nest boxes and a consequent increase in bluebird fledglings.

Nest boxes. The graph below summarizes the main elements of the data from 1996 through 2007. The first thing to notice in the graph is the increase in the number of nest boxes over 2006. In 2007 we got data for 3,638 nest boxes, an increase of a full 25% over the previous season. Although lots of people added boxes to their trails or added new trails, Vickie Fuquay, of Pittsylvania County may have set a record: In her first year of sending us data, she reported on 293 nest boxes!

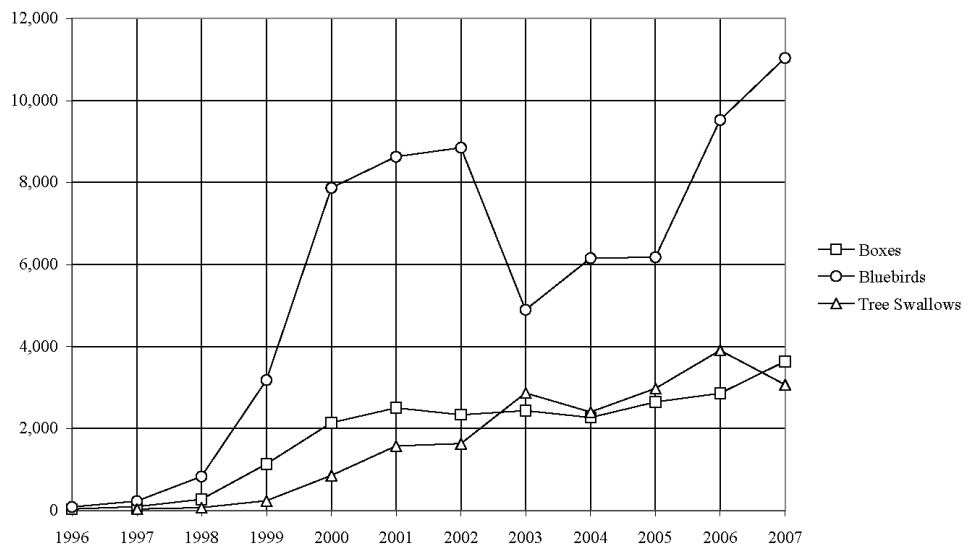
Bluebirds. The second thing to notice in the graph is the considerable up-turn in the number of bluebirds fledged: 11,037, compared to 9,522 in 2006. We believe that this increase is primarily due to the increased number of nest boxes available. This makes it pretty clear: if you put up nest boxes, you'll get bluebirds!

Tree Swallows. Data from previous years has suggested that there is some competition for nest boxes between bluebirds and tree swallows: look at the graph; in 2003 when the number of bluebirds fledged fell so drastically, the number of tree swallows fledged increased by 75 percent. In 2005, the number of bluebirds was level while the number of nest boxes increased and the number of tree swallows increased. the pattern seems to be repeated in 2007: the number of nest boxes and the number of bluebirds increased, while the number of tree swallows decreased by about 15 percent. I believe that the lesson of these results is that pairing nest boxes when tree wallows are present should have a big pay-off.

All in all, it was a very good season for all of the species that used our nest boxes. VBS boxes fledged a total of about 16,700 birds of all species, compared to about 15,200 in 2006.

– *Charlie Chambers*

Number of Bluebirds & Tree Swallows Fledged
1996 - 2007



Promoting bluebirds and other cavity nesters

The Bird Box

Issue 10.1

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.

Anne Little, President

(h) 540-373-4594

e-mail: thegate@cox.net

Beth Elkins, Vice President

(h) 540-374-5053

e-mail: beth_elkins@yahoo.com

Carmen Bishop, Vice President

(h) 703-764-9268

e-mail: cjbish@aol.com

David Mitchell, Treasurer

(h) 540-822-4553

e-mail: mitchelldf@donttaptheglass.com

Janet Locklear, Secretary

(h) 540-338-5283

e-mail: jlocklear@starmail.com

Directors

Helen Ellis, (h) 703-743-1642

e-mail: hedi143@aol.com

Julie Kutruff, (h) 703-339-5218

e-mail: JKutruff@aol.com

Nan LaRue, (h) 757-877-9415

e-mail: nan.larue@cox.net

Steve Living, (h) 757-465-6868

e-mail: Stephen.Living@dgif.virginia.gov

Earl Morris, (h) 540-776-1640

e-mail: emorris@ntelos.net

Brian Swanson, (h) 703-743-5220

e-mail: bcswanson@comcast.net

State County Coordinator

Barbara Chambers, (h) 703-978-6609

e-mail: bj.chambers@cox.net

Data Collector

Charlie Chambers, (h) 703-978-6609

e-mail: ce.chambers@cox.net

Bird Box Co-Editors

Sarah McDade, (h) 703-560-9899

e-mail: sarahmcdade@aol.com

Bob Sindermann, (h) 703-243-0796

e-mail: sinderbob@yahoo.com

We welcome your written items and artwork

(photos and drawings) for *The Bird Box*!

Send your materials by e-mail or on diskette to Sarah or Bob.

Save the Date – Saturday, November 1

Fall Meeting in Winchester

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, November 1**, to attend the VBS fall meeting at the Winchester War Memorial Building at 1001 East Cork Street.

Our meeting, which has a morning session from 10 a.m. to noon, is being held in conjunction with the Northern Shenandoah's Audubon Bird Festival. At 1:15, VBS board member and NABS Vice President, Brian Swanson, will do a bluebird presentation in the large auditorium, which is free to anyone attending the festival.

From Other Bluebird Skies

Montana. The Children's Bluebird Activity Book is now posted on the Mountain Bluebird Trails website: www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com. Written at the 4th grade level, this colorful 40 page book can be printed from the Web site. It is not for sale in printed form.

Wisconsin. The Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW) has a marvelous 14-photo display of bluebird wing development from Day 1-14. Go to BRAW's Web site, www.braw.org, and click on the bottom left box labeled NEW! Bluebird Chick Development. VBS recommends that you print this chart from a color printer and insert it in your monitoring notebook. That way, each team member has a handy reference available for aging those hatchlings!

Pennsylvania. The Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania had a presence at the January Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg. 185 new members joined! They must have been thinking of spring!

Oregon. In June 2006, four Mountain Bluebirds fledged from their home in an old Robin's nest in a juniper. Photographs of this unique arrangement for a cavity nester can be found in the summer 2007 edition of the Cornell Lab's *Living Bird* magazine.

Q & A Column

Ants in Nests

Question: Why do ants get into our bluebird boxes? There seem to be so many more this year.

Answer: When we have a lot of rain, and the ground gets saturated, the ants get flooded out of their homes in the ground. Consequently, they go **A**up in order to find a dry place to reestablish their ant houses. This is what we saw this past spring.

The mounting pole on our bluebird box is as good as any tree. The scout finds a nice dark, dry cavity at the top and tells the colony, chemically, to follow him! This is when a monitor circles the pole, up and under the snake guard, with Tanglefoot or gobs of Vaseline. There is no need to do so until the ants invade. You will notice that they bring all their eggs (furniture) with them. You must get them all out as they will kill a sitting female and young chicks. Just sweep them out and, if necessary, replace the original nest with one you make, in order to reestablish the eggs or young back in place. It is a nasty job, but oh, so very necessary.

Do you have a question for the Q&A Column? Send it to Sarah McDade at sarahmcdade@aol.com, or call 703-560-9899.

New Trail in Gretna

Mid-May found Gretna's Town manager David Lilly and Vice Mayor Keith Motley helping VBS members Vickie and Daniel Fuquay and Lexi Meadows installing a new 10 box trail on public lands. The new boxes were purchased by a grant from VBS and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Monitor Lexi Meadows reports successful fledging of bluebirds since the trail has been installed. Gretna is in Pittsylvania County.



Vickie and Daniel Fuquay join Gretna officials Keith Motley and David Lilly to install a new ten-box trail.
(Photo: Lexi Meadows)

Behind the Scenes

The Virginia Bluebird Society's own Barbara Chambers of Annandale is a volunteer for the telephone hotline of NABS (North American Bluebird Society). Off and on for four years, Barbara has fielded questions about bluebird behavior from bluebird enthusiasts across the country. NABS lists the hotline numbers on its Web site, www.nabluebirdsociety.org.



Barbara Chambers of Annandale with Ragdoll kitten, Bella. A founding member of VBS, Barbara loves cats, but in the interest of birds and the health of cats, is a firm believer in keeping cats indoors. Bella was carried outside for her "photo-shoot."
(Photo: Sarah McDade)

Gathering of Founders

The four smiling people in the photo at the right are founding members of the Virginia Bluebird Society and have faithfully attended Board meetings for over 11 years. Many VBS members have met them through the numerous outreach and education programs they present throughout the state. Here they are pictured at the March Board meeting in Richmond, where, among other things, it was determined that *The Bird Box* would be given a trial of three issues in partial color.



(Left to right) Anne Little, President; Charlie Chambers, Data Collector; Julie Kutruff, President Emeritus; Barbara Chambers, State-wide County Coordinator.
(Photo: Sarah McDade)

Guide to Aging Hatchlings in the Nestbox



Day 1



Day 4



Day 2



Day 5



Day 3



Day 6

Norman Griest, a VBS member from Purcellville, in Loudoun County, photographed 12 of the first 13 days in the lives of hatchlings in the bluebird nest he had in his backyard box this past spring. He is allowing *The Bird Box* to publish them so members who don't have backyard boxes can use them as an aging guide while visiting the trails. Just insert the pages in your monitoring notebook.



Day 7



Day 10



Day 8



Day 11



Day 9



Day 13

Special Notice to *Bird Box* Readers

We need your stories and photos for the upcoming edition. Please contact Sarah McDade by phone or e-mail (see page 2) about anything you think was interesting about your bluebird year. We all know strange things happen out there amidst all the fun!

House Finches Using Bluebird Boxes

The Jefferson Golf Course, a nine-hole Fairfax County-operated course in heavily populated Falls Church, has had one and maybe two clutches of House Finches using the bluebird nestboxes!

This is a new trail with new monitors, and trying to determine what birds were nesting in the boxes was definitely a challenge! House Sparrows had been abundant, and one box had bluebirds. The nesting of the House Finches was definitely a surprise, but with good give-and-take via e-mail with mentor Barbara Chambers, the monitors were able to positively I.D. the unexpected residents.

Bluebirds Nesting in Cannons

For the second year in a row, birder Arun Bose has spotted an active bluebird nest in a cannon at the Malvern Hill National Battlefield Park in Henrico County.

100 Years Ago

Roger Tory Peterson, flora and fauna artist, best known for his *Field Guide to Birds*, was born 100 years ago at Jamestown, New York, in August 1908.

Feature Photos



(Photo: Lexi Meadows)



One of many redbuds seen while monitoring the bluebird boxes at Brambleton Regional Golf Course, Loudoun County. These beautiful trees only enhance the enjoyment of counting all of those April bluebird eggs! (Photo: Sarah McDade)



(Photo: Lexi Meadows)

From Fairfax to Louisa And Back

A beautiful end-of-June morning unfolded before us along the rolling Virginia countryside as VBS charter members Barbara and Charlie Chambers and I drove south from Fairfax County to attend Lance Wood's Purple Martin Field Day in Louisa County. I'd had a bee in my bonnet to learn more about Purple Martins ever since I saw house sparrows take over a martin box at a golf course where I was monitoring bluebird boxes. I had figured it was only a matter of time before the house sparrows moved on to the bluebird homes. Pressing out-of-town engagements had kept me from attending the Field Day in previous years. In 2007, Barbara said she would join me if I made the two-hour trek south. That was a great idea because Barbara's an early riser and would hold me to my commitment, and she and I have become good friends since we met at a VBS box-building event. Having Charlie tag along with the gals was a bonus.

We were due at the Wood farm by 9:30 for the start of the program, but I was having so much fun talking to Barbara that I missed a turn. By the time we realized it, the only correction was a Virginia Scenic Byway, which just added to the fun. We were just a few minutes late and were warmly greeted by Priscilla Kingston, of Charlottesville, another VBS member. Priscilla and her husband Ron Kingston, of snake-guard fame, help Lance Wood each year with the martin field day. While getting our folding chairs out of the van, we could not help but notice the whirling and hear the singing of hundreds of purple martins as they tended to the young which would fledge in the next seven days. It was an amazing thing to behold, and the hummingbirds at the nearby feeders seemed to take everything in stride.

We sat in the shade at this pleasant farm with 100 other attendees, and watched Lance Wood give his outdoor presentation. What I learned was that being a good purple martin landlord takes considerable effort, and roomy gourds are preferable to the tight quarters of the martin "condos" and provide a higher survival rate. About seven weeks after attending the presentation, Lance's words proved prophetic as two of the four martin hatchlings died in a "condo" placed on a golf course where I monitor bluebird boxes. The quarters were so tight in that little unit that I wondered how any of them could survive.

At the end of the martin program, many of the attendees lingered and exchanged birding experiences. A good number were interested in bluebirds, and Ron Kingston was selling two books about bluebirds at discounted prices while answering questions. Barbara and I found ourselves explaining bluebird habits and monitoring tips to folks who lived in the nearby counties. After we said our goodbyes, I drove the van back down the long dirt road outside the farm and turned north. Lunch was on our minds and we happened upon the Pomme Restaurant on Main Street in Gordonsville. What a stroke of luck that was. This delightfully decorated restaurant was filled with diners, and while Barbara and I relished our gourmet salads, Charlie indulged in heartier fare with a little wine of the province. All three of us loved the surroundings.

Driving north again, we reached Gainesville in Prince William County in mid-afternoon. There we stopped at Backyard Boutique, a birding store run by another VBS member, Helen Ellis. Helen is a first-class photographer of bluebirds, and she has a lovely, popular store. I learned she does not sell millet in her store because it attracts house sparrows. Way to go, Helen!

As I write this, many months have passed since that pleasant, sunny day. I don't remember what I did that evening, but the day stands out as one filled with wonderful visions of the Virginia countryside, and delightful visits with the nice folks from around the state that I've met since joining VBS. Thank you, little bluebird.

– Sarah McDade, Fairfax County



Lance Wood's Purple Martin colony, June 2007.
(Photo: Sarah McDade)



Lance Wood with one of his bluebird boxes that has his preferred eight-inch-wide stovepipe snake guard.
(Photo: Sarah McDade)

How to Join Us

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.

Tax Deductible

VBS is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax-deductible.

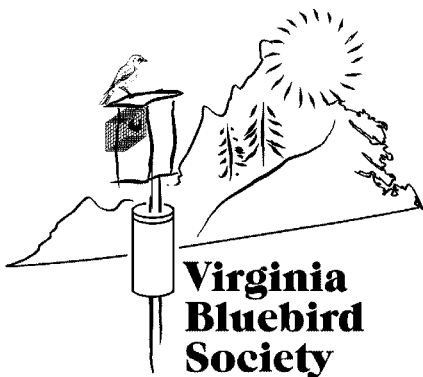
What's That in My Garden?

Hint: it's not a bluebird egg. Okay, for 11 years I have been counting bluebird, Tree Swallow, House Wren, chickadee, and Tufted Titmouse eggs, and I always have a little gasp of delight when I discover them.

Well, imagine the big gasp of surprise I let out when I found this chicken-size egg in my vegetable garden, buried about two inches deep in the soil under my pepper plants.

I went out one day in June to cultivate around my vegetables and to try to eradicate the jungle-size weeds that had grown overnight. I was a little more than dumb-founded to uncover this large white egg. Believe it or not, last year I uncovered the same type of egg in my flower garden about 75 feet away.

I have no idea what is going on. Can readers of *The Bird Box* supply me with the answer? – *Sarah McDade*



Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

**DATED
MATERIAL**