

The Bird Box

Summer 2013 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.viriniabluebirds.org



VBS Biennial Fall Conference

Join us on Saturday, November 9th in Charlottesville for the biennial Virginia Bluebird Society conference. Every other year, VBS invites members and non-members to a conference that's all about bluebirds and other cavity nesters. This year the meeting will be held at the Virginia Cooperative Extension office conveniently located near I-64 in Charlottesville in central Virginia. The conference will run from 9:30 to 2:30, followed by birding on nearby Secluded Farm, just off the Saunders-Monticello trail.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension office is located at 460 Stagecoach Road Charlottesville, Virginia 22902.

Directions: From I-64 Take Exit 120 then turn away from Charlottesville onto 5th Street Extended. About an eighth of a mile from the exit turn left onto Stagecoach Road. It is the second building on the right.

Our first presenter will be Dr. Marshall Faintich

Dr. Faintich is the birding activity manager for the Rockfish Valley Trail, the author of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Wintergreen*, and is listed in the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Speakers Directory. His wildlife photos have appeared in newspapers, magazines, web sites, government reports and presentations, and on wildlife and birding trail signs in Virginia and Maryland. His own web site contains more than 4,000 of his wildlife photos, and gets about 2 million hits per year from visitors in more than 80 countries around the world.

His hour-long presentation of some of his best photographs, "The Birds of Wintergreen," highlights 150 of the more than 220 species that can be seen in central Virginia, including of course, bluebirds. He plans to bring along a few copies of his book that will be available for purchase and signing at the meeting. Copies of his book can also be purchased in advance from Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com, and he would be happy to sign them at the meeting.

Mark your calendars; more information will be forthcoming. See you all in November!

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Virginia Bluebird Society
www.virginiabluebirds.org

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If you have a new e-mail 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!

E-mail your materials to Doug Rogers.

The Virginia Bluebird Society is an organization which runs on the love that people have in conserving bluebirds and other cavity nesters, and their habitat. Our volunteers are the life-blood of VBS. Our members' work is done away from the limelight, in the quiet company of nature. We realize that extra effort deserves recognition. That is why we've instituted awards to applaud the hard work put in by our members. **Please make this a priority!** Contact Christine Boran at this email address: woolwinehouse@gmail.com before September 1, 2013 and nominate a deserving person for an award. Awards will be given November 9th.

Following is the list of awards:

Barbara Chambers Memorial County Coordinator of the Year - This award is given in memory of Barbara Chambers and the energy and inspiration she brought to bluebird conservation. A county coordinator's job is to collect the data for the county and pass it on to VBS. This award is given to a county coordinator who goes the extra mile to organize, inspire and further bluebird conservation in their county.

Bluebirder of the Year - This award is given to the individual who promotes bluebirds through outreach to schools and community groups, promoting good bluebird management techniques, and helping others to love and care for the bluebird.

Volunteer of the Year - This award is given to an individual who helps promote and enhance VBS. By giving of their time and energy, this individual helps VBS and the bluebird to grow and flourish in VA.

The VBS "Heritage Award" - This award is not given every year by our organization. It recognizes an individual who has been a long time bluebirder. This is a special person who lives and breathes bluebirds, and has spent many years promoting bluebirds and the love of bluebirds.

Leucistic Bluebird

Photo by Paul Servis, Northern Neck Audubon.

Location: Indian Creek Subdivision in Lancaster County, VA.



On Simultaneous Bluebird/Swallow Nesting in Paired Boxes

Article by Larry Cartwright

Huntley Meadows Park hosts 27 boxes, and 20 of these boxes have been paired off since 2005. These paired boxes were initially situated up to 12 feet apart, but all of them have been moved to be within a few feet of each other since 2010. Since 2005, we have had 2 cases of simultaneous eastern bluebird and tree swallow nesting in paired boxes, but early data from 2013 that I have yet to review suggests up to 3 cases of simultaneous nesting, including a case of aggressive interaction with a bluebird and tree swallow literally fighting on the ground in a good old fashioned style brawl!

In 2012, Huntley Meadows had one instance of simultaneous nesting of eastern bluebirds and tree swallows in paired boxes. In early May tree swallows began nest building in one box soon after a brood of 5 bluebirds fledged from the neighboring box. On 27 May, when the five tree swallow nestlings were about 8 or 9 days old, the monitor reported a partial bluebird nest in the other paired box. By 3 June, all tree swallow nestlings were ready to fledge. While tree swallow nestlings were developing in one box, the adjacent bluebirds completed their nest and the female laid 4 eggs. During the two visits when both boxes were occupied, the monitor reported no interaction, aggressive or otherwise, between the breeding pairs. Both nesting attempts were successful and all eggs hatched and all nestlings fledged. The boxes were about two feet apart.

In 2009, eastern bluebirds and tree swallows nested simultaneously in paired boxes, but in this instance nest building and egg laying for the bluebirds began about a week earlier than the tree swallows. On 8 May inspection revealed 4 bluebird eggs in one box and a partial grass nest in the other. On 14 May, the tree swallow female had laid the first of 5 eggs. The bluebird eggs obviously hatched before the tree swallow eggs, and during one monitor visit, the tree swallows entered the box occupied by bluebirds to feed three day old bluebird nestlings! And with no objections from the bluebirds! The nesting attempt resulted in 4 fledged bluebirds and 3 fledged tree swallows. There were also two dead tree swallow nestlings, but no reports of trauma to the nestlings. Mortality has many causes. The boxes were about a yard apart.

Also in May 2009, tree swallows nested simultaneously in paired boxes, but these boxes were as much as 10 feet apart and apparently far enough from each other to prevent territorial aggressiveness between the conspecific breeding pairs.

Bluebird eggs are always **BLUE**, right?

Article by Donna Finnegan

On April 11th we did our first round of bluebird monitoring at Lake Anna State Park. Near the end of the trail I came upon a nestbox containing one egg and that egg was white. The nest was made neatly of pine needles and grass in the manner of a bluebird. It seemed to me the size also matched that of a bluebird egg. There was no bird present. I logged it on my survey sheet as a mystery. Bluebird eggs are always **BLUE**, right?

The internet is a wondrous thing when it comes to researching information such as this. Type “white bluebird eggs” in your search engine and in seconds you can learn more about *Sialia sialis* recessive genes, speculation and variation of coloration than you likely care to know. The gist of it all is that bluebirds lay white eggs 4-5% of the time. Who knew?! A bluebird that lays white eggs will always lay white eggs. The birds hatched are of normal color and fertilization.



I visited the box a few days later and found five lovely white eggs and a roosting female bluebird. Aren't bluebirds a wondrous thing?

Update: VBS Nestcam Project

Nineteen Boxes and Counting

Article by Vickie Fuqyay

VBS's Nest Cam Shipping Department (my garage) has been very busy this spring! We were allotted another \$1,000.00 to continue placing bluebird boxes fitted with cameras on school grounds to be used to teach students about our bluebird conservation efforts throughout the state of Virginia. The first 10 boxes went rather slowly as we had to set up pilot programs, test the cameras and get the word out.

By the time word made it to various counties in Virginia... mainly through the efforts of our county coordinators contacting schools, we were out of boxes. With the newly allotted money we were able to place an additional 9 camera boxes in schools around the state.

We set up two camera boxes in the Gretna area, one near Chatham, two in Chesterfield Co, one in Henrico Co, one in Floyd Co, one in Gloucester VA and one in the Northern Neck area in Kilmarnock. I have heard from quite a few schools with pictures of the installation of the boxes and even pictures of eggs hatching. Many of the schools were able to run the cable to the computer through a converter allowing everyone to log on and watch what is going on inside the nest box. You may log on to watch the chickadee on her eggs at Woodley Hills Elementary School. The site is www.ustream.TV/channel/whes-blue-bird-cam

I have one remaining camera box left in the shipping room... my garage.... and a husband who would love to ship it out to make room for all the traffic that comes and goes with mowers and the like for summer!

It is very easy to apply. You simply write a grant proposal following the guideline on the VBS website. It is found under the "About VBS" tab, then go to "Grant Programs"; the school grant program is the last one on that page. Let's get the word out once again... if you know teachers that may be interested please contact them and let them know what they are missing out on.

Email your grant request to vickiefuquay@comcast.net. Please include a phone number where I can reach the contact person for the program.



The adults in the picture (left to right) are Liz Elkovich, Lee Hesler and Dotty Rilee. The school is A.M. Davis Elementary.

Photo by Jane Hesler



Union Hall Elementary School, Chatham, VA

Photo by Carolyn Harris

Albino Bluebird Baby in Martinsville

Article and Photos by Jon R. Armstrong

We had in our yard what appeared to be an albino bluebird. The parents hovering and keeping watch were bluebirds. The bird could fly short distances but remained close to cover...there seemed to be no siblings. We have 2 nest boxes at the rear of our yard and offer meal worms for them and know there are young in them but can't prove that this bird is a part of either family.

As of dusk on the day of discovery the parents were still attentive and gathering bugs and I was able to get close enough to set a plate of meal worms near the bird who seemed to be settled for the night in a windowsill behind some shrubbery while mom and dad were guarding from our chimney. Our cat is an inside one but there are others in the neighborhood and we were concerned.

The morning after discovery the bird was out in the road with mom and dad still hovering. We left home for a short time to attend church and when we returned neither the baby nor the parent birds were visible. We feel we had a unique experience in seeing him. Notice how short his tail feathers are and the color of the eye. In the event of interest, we reside in Martinsville. Thanks again for your interest and allowing us to share this lovely spectacle, even though sad.



Monitoring Nestboxes Leads to Research

Article by Carmen Bishop

We faithfully check our boxes and record the nest building, eggs and chicks. But what else can we learn from our weekly visits to our nestboxes? Larry Cartwright has kept careful records and reviewed the simultaneous use of paired nestboxes at Huntley Meadows Park in Fairfax (see article page #3). While the paired nestboxes have not often been simultaneously used at Huntley, the results may be different across the state. I know that as I write this, tree swallows are simultaneously nesting in boxes 9 feet apart at Burke Lake Park, and bluebirds and tree swallows are nesting in boxes 60 feet apart in full view of each other at Frying Pan Farm Park. Compiling such data and looking for trends would be a great research project. And there are so many other options. Personally, I am interested in how the roofing material of a nestbox affects the temperature inside the box. This summer, I plan to check temperatures with an infrared thermometer. Your help with this project would be welcome! So let's keep careful records and think about how our data can be used to learn more about bluebirds and other cavity nesters. If you have ideas or would like to help with research, please contact me at cjbish@aol.com.

Nominations for VBS Board and Officers Fall Election

Elections for Officers and Board of Directors for VBS are held every two years at our biennial conference. This year's conference will be held in Charlottesville, VA on November 9, 2013. A slate of candidates will be presented to the membership for election at the conference. As per our by-laws, candidates can also be nominated from the floor prior to the election, or can declare themselves to be candidates any time prior to the conference.

If you wish to declare yourself as a candidate for any of the slots, please contact Anne Little, (540) 207-4298.

The Nominees for election for the 2014-2015 officers and board are as follows:

President – Carmen Bishop, Fairfax County

Vice President Education – Vickie Fuquay, Danville City

Vice President Membership and Trails – Lexi Meadows, Pittsylvania County

Secretary – Cathy Hindman, Prince William County

Treasurer – Mary Lohman, Fairfax County

Board of Directors – Doug Rogers, Albemarle County

Board of Directors – Earl Morris, Roanoke City

Board of Directors – Christina Woodson, Richmond City

Board of Directors – Paul Davis, Nelson County

Board of Directors – Ann Dunn, Albemarle County

Odd Occurrences on an Orange County Trail

Article and Photos by Pam McMillie

I suppose that the crazy March weather must be to blame for some downright addled decision making by the birds using the Price Road boxes here in Virginia's Orange County. First, I had the carolina chickadees attempting to dislodge a bluebird in box 10. The carolina chickadee even laid an egg in the bluebird's nest. Mamma bluebird wanted nothing to do with that. She simply pushed the chickadee egg to the side, and her four babies fledged the week of May 20th.

But something even more intriguing went down in box 6. Two mother birds, one carolina chickadee and one tufted tit-



mouse, were seen going in and out of the box for several weeks. As I was doing my weekly checks, I inevitably disturbed one of them. My notebook even noted this: "What the heck is going on in this box?" I wrote. I've alternated between thinking the nest was occupied by a carolina chickadee or a tufted titmouse. You can imagine my surprise when I opened the box on May 22nd only to see three carolina chickadees, and two tufted titmice looking out of the box. I'm blaming the March weather. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.



A Special Thank You to our Most Recent Endowment, Sustaining and Box Sponsors

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A Trip to Hog Island Wildlife Management Area

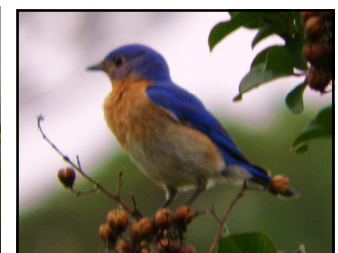
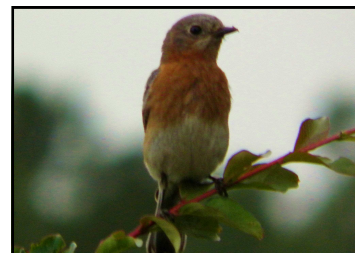
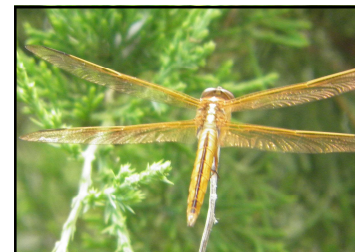
Article and photos by Doug Rogers

In late May, my wife, Joanne and I went birding at the Hog Island Wildlife Management Area just across the James River from Jamestown. Juvenile bald eagles were everywhere! They were as numerous as robins in spring. The skeletons of the fish they had caught and eaten (some with skulls as large as softballs) were frequently seen on the hiking paths. Great egrets were numerous; cedar waxwings were seen courting; red-winged blackbirds were heard on their territories - calling "Konk-A-Ree."

Great blue herons flushed from their fishing grounds giving voice with their croaking, gravelly voices. Common yellowthroats darted about in the marsh grasses. Several species of migrating warblers were there along with two or three species of sparrows. In all we saw 25 species of birds.

Dragonflies added color (and food) to the mix of birds.

Surprisingly, (because there were no man-made nest boxes in evidence) we saw a bluebird family there and assumed them to be nesting in a natural cavity; Mom, Dad and Junior who had just fledged. What a treat!



Mark your Calendar

September 1: Deadline for nominations for VBS awards. Send nominations to Christine Boran, woolwine-house@gmail.com

October 1: Deadline for nominations for VBS Board of Directors and Officers. Send nominations to Anne Little, thegate@cox.net. In addition, nominations by any member in good standing may be made from the floor at our meeting on November 9th.

October 3-5: North American Bluebird Society Conference, Aiken SC
www.nabluebirdsociety.org

October 11-13: Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival, Cape Charles

November 9: VBS Biennial Conference, Charlottesville. Information will be available on the website or contact Carmen Bishop, cjbish@aol.com

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 website: www.virginiabluebirds.org



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