

# The Bird Box

Summer 2017 Newsletter of the  
Virginia Bluebird Society [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)



## Stony Mill Elementary Students and Bluebirds

By Kathleen McGarvey  
Stony Hill Elementary Second Grade Teacher



Students at Stony Mill Elementary School have been dedicated caretakers of four nest boxes that were installed on our school grounds. Three of the boxes had nests being built within 24 hours of their installation. It was exciting to

make learning about animal and plant life cycles so personal. The best learning happens when an emotional connection takes place. That's why kids can rattle off phone numbers of their 20 closest friends or recall the lyrics to an entire album of music.

Each week the students recorded observations and checked information from the Virginia Bluebird Society website. They learned to identify eggs, researched the life stages of hatchling to fledgling, and marveled at the beauty and dedication of the male/female bluebird couple. This experience stirred excitement around the entire school building. Other teachers, custodians, and staff members would stop our class and let us know what they had witnessed while moving about the school campus.



In addition to our bluebird nest boxes, our second grade students planted a garden while reading *How Groundhog's Garden Grew*. Birds would come and pick at our berries, bees and other insects came to pollinate, and once again learning became personal. We even had a beekeeper bring a bee pod to our classroom! Our goal is to raise money to purchase an additional nest/nature camera for the fourth grade wing of our building so that we can expand our data collection and contribute to the longevity of the natural environment. If we can get permission, we may even attempt to raise honey bees.

Thank you, Virginia Bluebird Society for your generosity and for making this wonderful experience possible.

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# York County Schools Nestcams

By Barbara Dunbar

Program Director of 4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach

The Spring of 2017 came to some of the York County Schools with many students eagerly anticipating going to school each morning! The Virginia Bluebird society, through a grant program, awarded five schools all materials necessary to set up a successful bluebird box along with a camera, enabling students to see what is happening in the nest. Each school was matched up with a Virginia Master Naturalist to guide them in setting up the box and provide further education to the students. Some of the highlights from the schools are listed below:

Bruton High School – Box was installed on February 21<sup>st</sup> and two days later a pair of bluebirds decided to call it home. On March 31<sup>st</sup> there were five eggs.

Students were worried, as this was the day before Spring Break started; however, the eggs did not start hatching until April 11<sup>th</sup>, after students returned. Unfortunately, it appears the male bluebird was killed, but all babies fledged, and another bluebird pair has started to build a nest.

Mrs. Lockwood, teacher, simply says “It has been a joy to share this with my students”.

York High School – Last year they had two successful bluebird clutches and this year the bluebirds seem to still want their house by the frog pond. Next year they are planning on moving the webcam box.

Tabb High – Has had one successful clutch.

Tabb Middle – Classes have been able to observe how starlings will utilize the bluebird boxes and the importance of removing their nests. They have three bluebird eggs they have been monitoring.

Waller Mill Elementary – Like York High, Waller Mill has bluebirds nesting in two of their standard boxes (they have a trail of six boxes) but so far no interest in their new high-tech home.



Two other schools who received Bluebird nestcams late this spring are waiting until next year to install them since the school year was almost over. All teachers involved in this program have commented that having received the generous grant from the Virginia Bluebird Society has gone a long way in helping them teach students about their natural world. Just listening to the students proves this is something they will not forget and bluebirds are their new favorite bird.

## Happy Birthday Bruton High Bluebirds!

By Amanda Williams  
Virginia Gazette

11 April 2017 was **Hatching Day** at Bruton High School. By 2:45 pm, the first two of their bluebird eggs had hatched. Three other chicks hatched, as was evident the next morning, with no sign of any eggshell pieces left in the nest.

Here’s how bluebirds came to nest at BHS:

1. Late in 2016, Amy Lockwood, a science teacher at BHS applied to the Virginia Bluebird Society for a bluebird setup.
2. In January 2017, Vickie Fuquay of VBS administered the grant and handed off the materials for BHS to Barbara Dunbar, Program Director of 4-H Schoolyard Habitats Outreach, a program of Virginia Cooperative Extension York/Poquoson.



Continued, page 3



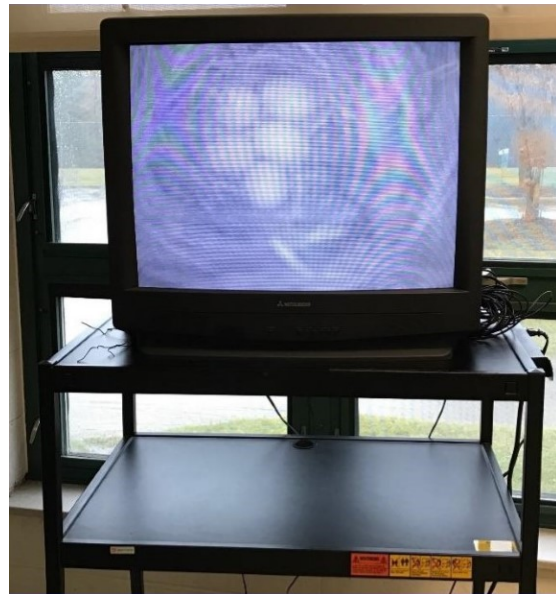
## Happy Birthday, Bruton High Bluebirds, continued

3. Barbara delivered the goods to BHS and connected Amy with Deane Gordon and Geoffrey Giles, both Virginia Master Naturalists with the Historic Rivers Chapter and members of the Williamsburg Bird Club.
4. On 21 February, Deane and Geoff helped ensure proper installation of the pole, nestbox, and baffle at BHS.
5. Will Bennett, BHS Educational Technology Facilitator, then hooked up the nestcam to stream video on a monitor inside the school.
6. On 31 March, just before Spring Break, BHS students spotted five eggs in the nest.
7. 11 April was Hatching Day! Will tweeted out the news vial the BHS twitter account.
8. Candice Myers, BHS Math Teacher, took video of the new chicks with her iPad.

Excerpt reprinted with permission. See full article here:

<http://www.vagazette.com/news/va-vg-baby-bluebirds-hatch-on-live-cam-at-bruton-high-20170413-story.html>

Many thanks to the Virginia Bluebird Society and all who helped bring bluebirds to the BHS Community or helped spread the good news!



Left: Amy Lockwood and Deane Gordon, photo by Geoffrey Giles; Right: Live streaming of bluebird box, photo by Amy Lockwood

## VBS Nestbox at Smithsonian Institute

Read here, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/bluebirds-and-philanthropy>, "Making a Place for Eastern Bluebirds—and philanthropy," about the Virginia Bluebird Society nestbox that is now a part of the Smithsonian's philanthropy collection. Amanda Moniz, David M Rubenstein Curator of Philanthropy in the Division of Home and Community Life, relates how the box came to their collection, its background, and the history of bird conservation in America.

You can also access this blog from the Virginia Bluebird Society FaceBook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Bluebird-Society-133048243442687/>.



## Seasonal Wild Bird Buffet Recipes - LaSauce Style

Thursday 06 February 2014



Those of you who follow my blog realize how I adore hosting wild birds in my central Virginia gardens. With frequent coaching from a local naturalist and a bluebird guru, I confidently care for wild feathered visitors year round. Being a long-time foodie, I could not resist reinventing a wild bird banquet recipe found in *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*.



This handsome Red Bellied Woodpecker dines regularly at the Yankee Seed Saver feeder. It really enjoys the LaSauce Buffet Recipe.

I confess, I am suspicious of any food that is genetically modified (GMO) and seek organic foods for both me and my food clients, so why not for the birds???

Also an avid label reader, I find most bird foods do not list country of origin, date of production, nor GMO ingredients. Therefore, I avoid *all* commercially produced mixes.

**Suet** (the hard fat surrounding the kidneys and loins of beef and mutton) is another concern, as I strongly suspect that its source comes from beef feedlots in the Midwest US. Again, I do not condone industrial meat production. When I inspect suet block labels, nada, no information there. When asked, retailers do not know origins either. Call me a fanatic, yet until there is a definitive, credible proof that GMO grains and feedlot suet are safe, I will avoid them like the plague.



- nestling bluebirds day nine-Swallowtail Cottage.

Would you feed them GMO food?

**LaSauce Spring/Warm Weather Wild Bird Buffet Recipe** is a combo of shelled sunflower seeds, dry currants, ground eggshells, and sunflower oil—plain and simple.

All ingredients are purchased in bulk at my local health food-minded market.

Simply whirl two cups of seeds and one-half cup of berries in a food processor until slightly chopped, about three seconds (remember this saves the birds labor and morsel loss).

Add ground organic/cooked egg shells (2 T), then toss with a tablespoon of sunflower oil to moisten. The oil helps the egg-shell powder stick to the seed, yet will not choke the birds. Portions are approximate and easy to make. Birds are not picky! If I notice one ingredient being consumed faster, I add more of that next batch. Detailed recipes can be found on the link below.

Happy birding!

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Read Diane LaSauce's full blog post and explore additional bluebird posts at <https://dianelasauce.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/wild-bird-buffet-recipe-lasauce-style/>



## Bluebirds in Lake of the Woods

By Bev Arnold, Lake of the Woods community, Locust Grove, Virginia

Reprinted with permission from *Lake Currents*, the Official Newsletter of the Lake of the Woods Association, Inc., Vol. 14, No. 19  
April 28, 2017

Bluebird house builders and installers, (L-R) are: Dan Greene, Jim Arnold, Roy Strawhun, and Glynn Smith.

Spring is definitely here and our Eastern bluebirds (and at least one Carolina chickadee) are already making themselves at home in the bluebird boxes on the Lake of the Woods golf course!

In our last article (in the Lake Currents newsletter) we were grateful for the contributions of the Ladies Golf Association (LGA), the Lake of the Woods Garden Club, the golf management and residents Dan Greene, Chris Browning, and Bev and Jim Arnold. Now with Glynn Smith acting as the liaison between the Lake of the Woods Woodworkers Club and Kathy Smith of the LGA, we have even more to be grateful for! In November, the LOW Woodworkers Club, with the financial support of the LGA, built and installed eight cedar bluebird boxes to replace those that could no longer be used. This has truly become a standout community effort. What's more, with these combined efforts the LOW Bluebird Trail has been sanctioned by the Virginia Bluebird Society as part of their network of bluebird trails. Every week from April through August, trained volunteers monitor each box to observe nests, eggs, and young to promote the conservation of Eastern bluebirds and other native cavity nesters.

Thank you to all of the LOW groups and residents who have come together to support another successful bluebird season!

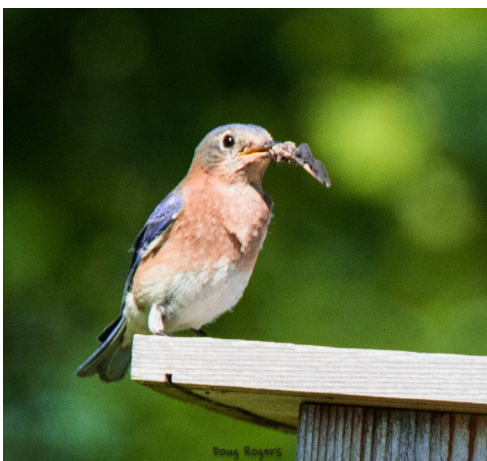
Editor's note:

According to Chris Browning, Orange County Coordinator, this 17 box trail's complete disrepair was discovered in the spring of last year. It had been installed several years prior, but had not been actively monitored nor taken care of in years. Immediate work was done in the early spring to replace and repair several of the boxes, as well as to install snake cones and Noel guards on all of the boxes. The season went exceptionally well with the fledging of 78 bluebirds, 3 chickadees, and 7 house wrens. Repairs continued this spring with the final replacement of the last few boxes that we were not able to get to in time for last season.

## Locust Grove Middle School Trail

By Chris Browning, Orange County Coordinator

The newest trail in Orange County, the Locust Grove Middle School Trail of 5 boxes built and installed as an Eagle Scout project, are doing extremely well. All of the boxes have had nest attempts and 14 bluebirds and 5 chickadees have already fledged. Another 14 bluebirds (10 hatched and 4 still pending) are on their way, along with another chickadee nest that's pending eggs. Zachary Browne of Boy Scout Troop #197 was the scout who took on this project. Zachary passed his Court of Honor and obtained his Eagle Scout Rank on May 26.



Bluebird photos contributed by Doug Rogers, VBS Board member, showing bluebirds from his nest box trail on property owned by Martha Jefferson Hospital on Pantops Mountain in Albemarle County near Charlottesville. . This is the fifth season this trail has been in existence.



## NOMINATIONS FOR VBS BOARD AND OFFICERS ARE OPEN

Would you like to serve the Virginia Society in an administrative way? Would you like to know all the inside scoop? Would you be willing to attend two meetings per year with a group of really great people who like bluebirds and enjoy spreading that joy? We are seeking people to serve for two years on the board. We will hold the election of Officers and Board members at our fall conference. We welcome your interest and will allow nominations now through November 18<sup>th</sup>. Would you nominate yourself or someone you know who would enjoy serving? Nominations are accepted from the floor at the conference also. For further information or to nominate please contact Cathy Hindman (703-470-7425) or [Cathy20112@gmail.com](mailto:Cathy20112@gmail.com)

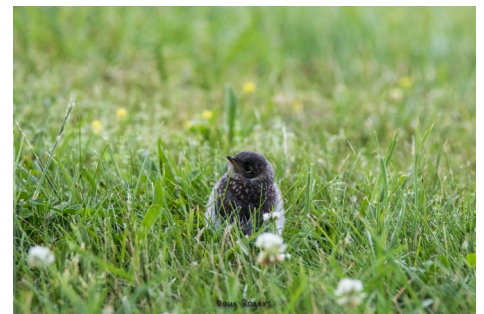
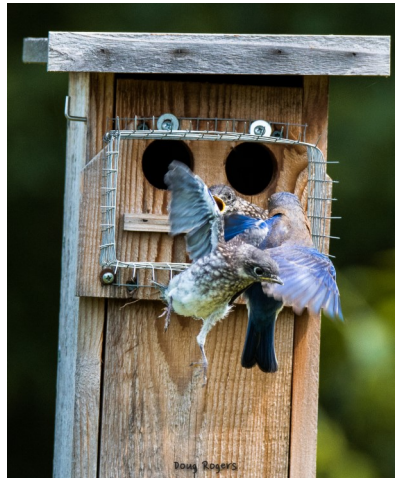
### Pulaski Bluebird Trail

By Vickie L. Houk, Pulaski, Virginia

In the first year of Pulaski's bluebird trail on the scenic Dora Trail, the 10 boxes have all been occupied with lots of bluebirds, tree swallows, and chickadees. By June 11, 20 bluebirds and 6 chickadees have fledged. This tree swallow nest with 8 eggs now has 6 young.



More beautiful photos from Pantops Mountain, Charlottesville, contributed by Doug Rogers, VBS Board member.



### VBS Biennial Fall Conference

Save the date on Saturday, November 18 in Charlottesville for our Virginia Bluebird Society conference from 9:30—2:30. Every other year, VBS has this one day event with lunch included. A registration form will be available later this summer on our website. We are excited to have Bob Schamerhorn returning to talk about “Gardening for Birds.” We will also hear from Pattie Reum and the Kestrel box project. This is a great way to network with other birders and meet your VBS Officers and Board members.

Newsletter of the  
**Virginia Bluebird Society**  
[www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)

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If you have a new email address, or have  
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We welcome your written items and artwork  
(photos and drawings) for *The Bird Box*!

## The Bluebird Advisor

By Anne Little



### Dear Bluebird Advisor,

I use a cone baffle on my boxes instead of the stovepipe baffle that VBS recommends but I have had some predation and am not sure what the problem is. Can you help me?

### Bluebirder

### Dear Bluebirder,

Unless the cone baffles are very wide, (minimum 36 inches), large Eastern Rat snakes can get past them. Cone baffles are on a pole that is stationary. This snake species when large, can literally stand on their tail ends and leverage themselves past this stationary baffle, using their scales to grip to methodically and slowly get to their food source. The most effective baffle is the 8-inch wide WOBBLING stovepipe guard that we show on our website (Note: VBS now recommends using an 8-inch stovepipe instead of 6 inch for added security). It is important that the stovepipe wobbles. This prevents predators from getting past it. Stationery stovepipe guards are not recommended. Also, hang the stovepipe as high up as possible just under the nestbox. We have two different designs for the stovepipe guard. The Ron Kingston design with the hardware cloth lid or the solid stovepipe cap. Both are very effective. The Kingston design is lower cost. Please see our website for instructions on how to buy and make the guards. Here is the link: [http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/BB\\_Guards\\_12-11-2012.pdf](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/BB_Guards_12-11-2012.pdf)

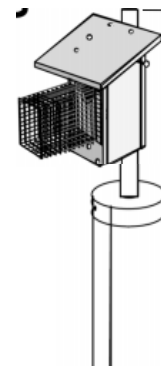
VBS is also updating the design of the Noel Guard and putting prongs on the outer edges. Noel Guards tend to thwart snakes when the guards are pronged out on the edges. The snake will abort predation and avoid injuring its scales against the prongs. Snakes can maneuver themselves around the guards if the edges are smooth. We prong the edges out and away to prevent bird's wings hitting them as they enter and exit the nestbox.

No predator control is 100% effective. There is always the possibility that predators will find a way around the guards. The best we can hope for is to not set our bluebirds up for failure and install the best nestboxes that we can.

### The Bluebird Advisor

Guest Advisor Christine Boran

Send your questions to  
[vbs@virginiabluebirds.org](mailto:vbs@virginiabluebirds.org)





## Mark Your Calendars

<b>June and July</b>	Continue monitoring nest boxes; check for parasites such as wasps and blowflies.
<b>August 9</b>	Deadline for submitting articles, photos, and artwork for summer newsletter
<b>November 18</b>	Biennial Fall Conference in Charlottesville (see page 6)

## 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](mailto:carjuwa@hotmail.com) by August 9 to be considered for the fall newsletter.*



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