

# The Bird Box Bird Box

Summer 2019 Newsletter of the  
Virginia Bluebird Society [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)



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### Expect the Unexpected - Virginia Bluebird Society Biennial Fall Conference

The Virginia Bluebird Society is hosting its one-day biennial conference on Saturday, November 16, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the Dorothy Hart Community Center in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Keynote speaker for the conference is Bet Zimmerman Smith, a North American Bluebird Society board member and Life Member of NABS. Ms. Smith saw her first Eastern Bluebird in 1998, after installing a nest box received as a gift. She and her husband then adopted several “abandoned” bluebird trails, which eventually expanded to a network of 100 boxes in Woodstock, Connecticut, which subsequently led to her comprehensive educational web site about bluebird and small cavity nester conservation: [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org). Ms. Smith’s program, “Bluebirding oddities: Expect the Unexpected,” will cover weird nesting locations, nest construction, nest box occupants, eggs, and bluebird plumage. It promises to be both highly entertaining and enormously educational.

Additional educational opportunities at this year’s conference will include breakout sessions covering topics ranging from attracting and feeding bluebirds in your back yard, nest box trail setup, monitoring and pest management, and bluebird photography. VBS board members will also be sharing information on VBS grant programs for new and refurbished trails, youth and scout grants, school nest cams, and the newly announced youth scholarship program. Expect something for everyone, from the novice to the more seasoned bluebirder.

Registration opens September 1, and more details will be available soon on the Virginia Bluebird Society’s web site: [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org). Follow us also on Facebook: Virginia Bluebird Society.

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### VBS: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

By Vickie Fuquay, Pittsylvania County Coordinator

My journey with the Virginia Bluebird Society began in 2005 when I heard a presentation by Anne Little about VBS, the bluebird trails (mostly in Northern Virginia), how to protect them from predators, and monitoring bluebird trails. Southern Virginia had been putting up houses and keeping up with our blues since the 80’s, but we had no trails other than families putting up houses in their back yards and farmers putting them on fence posts.



*Right: Bluebird nestlings with mouths wide open saying thank you VBS for their homes, in one of the cemetery trail nest boxes in Danville. Photo by Vickie Fuquay*

*Continued on page 2*

## VBS :Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow *continued from page 1*

Anne lit a fire in me to get the word out: all houses must be on poles with predator guards, and it is good to look in on those boxes at least once a week! We had a meeting at a local greenhouse and I began giving talks on the Eastern Bluebird. With permission, I started a bluebird trail at a local cemetery with three boxes, hoping to have five by the end of the summer in 2006. I asked folks to join VBS and mailed in an envelope with twenty-one new member registrations and their dues. I got a call from Barbara Chambers (who was a founding member of VBS). Those of you who knew her, know that she could get you, hook, line, and sinker!

VBS mailed me funds for twenty boxes right away, and Danville's Cemetery Trails were under way. By then, Barbara had recruited me as County Coordinator and I haven't looked back! We now have thirty-three bluebird boxes in five cemeteries. My passion for the bluebirds caught on citywide and beyond. When I ran out of cemetery space, we birthed the Adopt-A-Box program for our beautiful Riverwalk Trail. From May until August 2006, fifty new bluebird houses were purchased with an "In Memory" or "In Honor" name plate on the front of the box and placed along the Riverwalk Trail here in Danville. There are now 106 boxes on the trail. From there it grew to school grounds and assisted living homes. Today there are more than 300 boxes on public land in Danville and Pittsylvania County. Each box is checked weekly by a host of bluebird monitors. Our first year of reporting stats to VBS was in 2007 and we reported 1407 bluebird babies fledged, and the reports kept growing for Pittsylvania County. As of 2017, we have had 27,856 bluebird babies fledged that were reported, and countless others in back yard boxes that didn't report to VBS. Thank you Anne Little, Barbara Chambers, and Virginia Bluebird Society for taking a chance on us in 2006.

It has been a pleasure to serve on the VBS board for years and see how this organization has impacted not only our beautiful bluebirds but our other cavity nesters as well. My concern is that once the founders need to pass the baton to the next generation, will they continue to run with it?

This is where our passion to get nest cams in Virginia Schools comes into play. We must ignite the passion in the next generation, and how better to do this than to be able to show them right in their classroom! I encourage those who may be reading this to send teachers to our web site to see our many grant programs. We have grants to refurbish old trails and to build new ones; this is what funded the cemetery trails in Danville. We have grants to help scouts and other groups build bluebird boxes. I have mentored three boys who received their Eagle Scout level through this grant, and we used these houses to begin bluebird trails at Danville public schools. Lastly we have the nest cam program, which is a grant to provide the nest box, predator guards, and cameras to schools that apply. All of these resources may be found at <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/about-vbs/grant-programs>.



*Left: Students in the library at Grove Park Elementary in Danville, watching the nest cam*

*Right: Vickie Fuquay and Christine Boran installing a nest box at Woolwine Elementary in Patrick County.*

*Photos by Vickie Fuquay*

## Bevell's, Bluebirds, and Blackstone

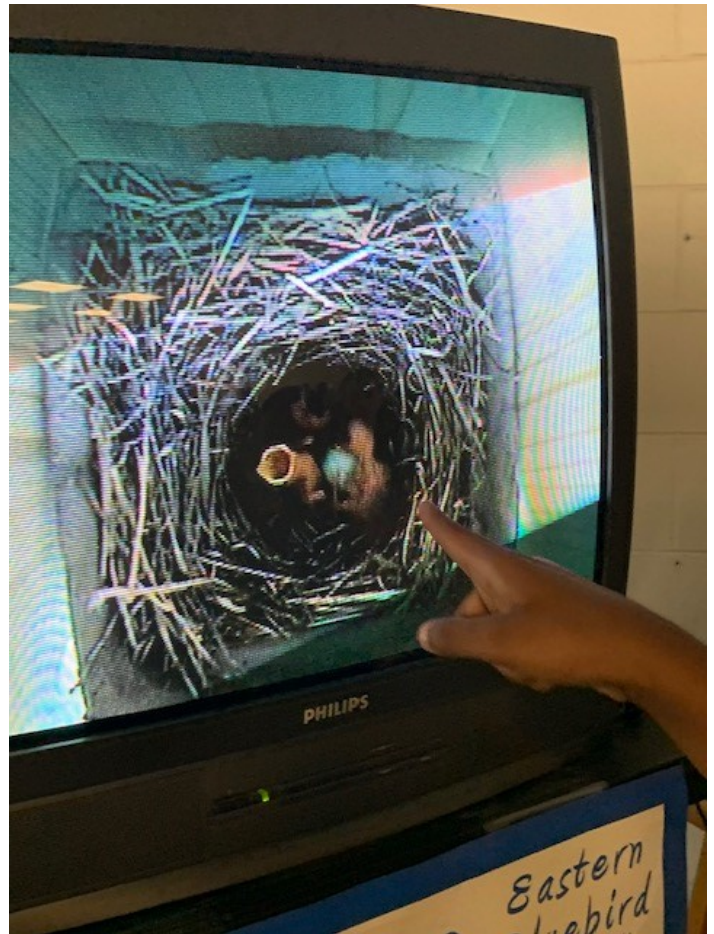
By Daphne Cole, Blackstone, Virginia

Two years ago, as Vickie Fuquay of Danville, Virginia, traveled to Blackstone, Virginia, to view the annual Christmas Holiday Train display at Bevell's Hardware, she noticed fields in Nottoway that were perfect as bluebird habitat. She wondered why there weren't bluebird trails in Nottoway.

Two years ago, Daphne Cole of Blackstone began volunteering as a Master Naturalist and was monitoring bluebird trails as a citizen scientist in Pocahontas State Park. She, too, wondered why there weren't bluebird trails in Nottoway.

The two women began working on making bluebird habitats available by utilizing the Virginia Bluebird Society's School Nestcam grants. Three nest boxes with cameras were set up in April, 2019, at Blackstone Elementary, Crewe Primary School, and Nottoway Intermediate School.

Although a bit late in the breeding season, the bluebird boxes and nest cams were an almost immediate success. The video monitors in the schools were strategically placed so everyone could watch the boxes throughout the school day. The boxes were occupied within a week or two, eggs were laid, and the schools reported complete fascination for the bluebirds. There was time to see the complete cycle with the birds fledging as the students left for summer!



*A student points out nestlings on the new school nest cam monitor at Nottoway Intermediate School.*

*Photo by Kara Shorter*



The next step for Vickie and Daphne was to establish bluebird trails in Nottoway County by applying to the Grants for New or Refurbished Bluebird Trails program. Then the two women met in person in May, 2019, to fill Daphne's Prius with nest boxes, predator guards, and poles.

The town of Blackstone allowed Daphne to place ten boxes throughout the town in parks, the historic area, and cemetery. Again, almost immediately birds began moving in and are laying eggs already.

Now Fuquay and Cole can wonder no more. Nottoway County now has 13 boxes for these birds who were once diminishing in numbers due to lack of habitat brought on by extensive construction and elimination of wooden posts. Another trail is in the works for Nottoway Intermediate School as well as two more nest cams for the Blackstone Library and Pocahontas State Park.

*Left: How many bluebird boxes can a Prius hold? There was concern that it wouldn't hold 10, but there was room for at least five more. 10 bluebird boxes and 10 predator guards*

*Photo by Daphne Cole*

## Sister Wives, Bluebird Style

By Vickie Fuquay, Pittsylvania County Coordinator

The local cemeteries of Danville, in Southside Virginia, are home to the best bluebird trails in the area. With several active trails and over 300 boxes on public land, our cemeteries consistently produce the most bluebirds per box. Of our five local cemeteries, strange happenings started appearing in one of the oldest.

Box #2 of the Green Hill Cemetery Trail started with a very large full nest on April 4. The next week on April 11, there were eight bluebird eggs, so I knew something was up - thinking it must be two females. On April 17, six days later I found nine eggs and two mama blues sitting side by side in tight quarters! I have had a nest with eight eggs before, two females and one male attending the nest, so I had this figured out! What I did not know was they would both incubate eggs together where I thought they took turns.

Returning on April 25, there was one baby and eight eggs, so I returned three days later to find eight babies and



*Nine bluebird eggs in one nest, laid by two females sharing a nest. Green Hill Cemetery Trail in Danville, Virginia. Photo by Vickie Fuquay.*



*Eight bluebird nestlings; three are behind the others in size. Photo by Vickie Fuquay*

one unhatched egg. Three babies looked a day or so behind the other five in size and one looked extremely weak. I waited six more days to check and found seven babies doing well, but two definitely looked a day or so younger than the other five on May 4. The parents had removed the unhatched egg and one baby was gone, most likely the tiny weak one that did not survive.

My next check was late due to bad storms and wet weather. I was able to check them on May 13 making them 18 days old. They were fledging, and as I approached the box I was dive bombed by four adult bluebirds, two males and two females. These "Sister Wives" really were two families dwelling in one house!

The latest update, as of May 29: there was a new large nest with the first egg of a new clutch after I had cleaned the box out on May 18. I cannot wait to see what happens in this box next!

## Special Thanks

Thank you to our sustaining and endowment members who support VBS:

### Endowment Members 2018/19

Anonymous  
Lorrie and Gordon Aitken  
Donald Akers  
David and JoAnne Bauer  
Renate and Ted Chapman  
Fredericksburg Birding Club  
Renaë Grebe  
Gary Knipling  
Michelle McDevitt Kona  
Leesburg Senior Center  
Karl and Anne Little  
Charles Mackall  
Vickie Matheis  
Monticello Bird Club

Paula Parsons  
Landan Paul  
Tonia Powell  
Primland Resort  
Lynne Ratz  
Kathryn Scudera  
Carol Sottili  
Elizabeth Walker

### Sustaining Members 2018/19

Judith Albert  
Susan Appel  
Augusta Bird Club  
AYR Hill Garden Club  
Curtis Backus  
David and Nancy Barbour

Mike and Sheila Bishop  
Bob's Beautiful Bells, Cathy McNichols  
Ricklin Brown  
Christopher Browning  
Ann Dunn  
Hyland Fowler, Jr.  
Col. Davis and Bonnie Frazelle  
Jennifer Higham  
Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists  
Ika Joiner  
Bruce and Susan Jones  
Robert and Jennifer Katt  
Sharon King  
Lucinda Jones and Robert Livingstone

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## Special Thanks, continued from page 4

### Sustaining Members, continued from page 4

Julie Kutruff  
Celeste Land and Kent Giles  
John and Deborah Markham  
Suzanne Miller and Tony Quezon  
Carl Otto  
Weston and Holly Rhodes  
Rockfish Valley Foundation  
Bob and Kris Peckman  
Nancy Shipman  
Roger and Pat Temples  
David and Karen Timer  
Carolyn Williams  
Alfred Wilson III

### These members sponsor bluebird boxes. We are thankful for their support.

Donald Akers (Nest cam)  
Debbie Brinkley  
Hank Burchard  
R Caudill  
Joe Gardner  
Walter and Carol Hadlock  
MaryAnn Harvey  
Walter Hussey  
Holly James  
Harry and Stephanie Jones  
Jacqueline Kennedy  
Ron and Priscilla Kingston  
Linda Langdon

Mette Langer  
Tess McAllister  
Eileen Parlow  
Tonia Powell  
Adrienne Stefan  
Bill Tatly  
Roger and Pat Temples  
Doris Thomas

### We are also thankful for these generous donations that help us carry on the mission of VBS:

Douglas and Linda Adams  
Brenda Arthur  
Victoria Baturay  
Terry Bennett  
Bonnie Bernstein  
Colin Birchler  
Robyn Boggs  
Kathleen Britts  
Marilyn Chalmers  
Christina Clarke  
Edward and Mary Crabbs  
Mary Dorsey-Lee  
Kathleen Duncan  
Barbara Fuhrman  
Joe Gardner  
Jeannie Gilman  
Steven Bershader and Maggie Godbold  
Anna Goddard  
Margaret Grieshaber

Ronald Grimes  
John and Julia Hacker  
Jay and Carol Haddock  
Molly Kerr  
Timothy Kidd  
Joella Killian  
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Virginia Corbett Marshall  
Sharon Morrow  
Glenys Mulholland  
Janet Paisley  
Michael Powell  
Camille Reilly  
Libbie Reubush  
Karin Rindal  
Roanoke Valley Bird Club  
Dr. James and Donna Rubis  
Leah Samuels  
Marc Savine  
Adrienne Stefan  
Anne Sturm  
Richard Tuttle  
Pauland Sandra Uhler  
William and Cheryl Walker  
Thomas and Bonnie Wasmund  
Sandy Weber  
Frank and Pat Wilczek  
Carolyn Williams  
Bob Wybraniec

## Award Nominations Needed

We are seeking your nominations for that citizen scientist that goes above and beyond the normal course of volunteering. We have instituted awards recognize our dedicated volunteers and applaud their hard work. The awards will be presented at our biennial conference in Fredericksburg on November 16.

Here is a list of the 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 Virginia.

### VBS Heritage Award

This award is not given every time 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 who has spent many years promoting bluebirds and the love of bluebirds.

Please contact Anne Little at [thegate@cox.net](mailto:thegate@cox.net) to nominate someone for an award. If you are not sure what category that person should be nominated for, just submit the name and we will take it from there. Nominations must be in no later than October 15.



## Virginia Bluebird Society Board Member Featured in Blue Ridge Life Magazine

Sent in by Ron Kingston, Virginia Bluebird Society Board Member

Shared with permission from BlueRidgeLife.com

Paul Davies is spotlighted in the June 2019 issue of *Blue Ridge Life Magazine*, No. 171, page 27, "The Rocket Science of Bluebird Boxes." Paul is building bluebird boxes out of each type of wood from native trees in Virginia and displaying them at the Quarry Gardens in Schuyler, Virginia. You can read the story at [https://issuu.com/blueridgelife/docs/brl\\_32pg\\_june2019\\_052919\\_issuu](https://issuu.com/blueridgelife/docs/brl_32pg_june2019_052919_issuu) .



*Birdwatcher with a Camera*

*Bluebird box with House Sparrow deterrent.*

*Photo by Doug Rogers*

## To Kill a House Sparrow

By Doug Rogers, Virginia Bluebird Society Board Member

I have had House Sparrow (HOSP) attacks on my nest boxes for the past four years. My first line of defense, four years ago, was the Linda Violette Double-Holed Mansion. I got three of these boxes and that seemed to work. No more HOSP attacks were noted prior to last year. (Editor's note: See The Bird Box, Summer 2018, p. 4, "Thwarting House Sparrows")

Last year, I had a HOSP take up residence in one of my Linda Violette boxes. The male would sit in the pronged-out Noel

guard and sing his heart out. I have a friend who lives over in The Valley and he deters HOSP by hanging two shiny nuts (as in "nuts and bolts") on the front edge of the roof of his boxes and the HOSP will not enter his boxes. So, I tried hanging shiny metal washers in front of the box. The HOSP ignored them. Then I removed the Noel guard (and left the washers in place) and the HOSP moved on to another of my boxes. I put up shiny washers on the front of that box and the HOSP left. By the time the Bluebirds were thinking about a second nesting another HOSP appeared and, again, I put up shiny washers and the HOSP moved on. Given my success, I posted this on the *Facebook* site, Bluebird Landlords, and told everybody who would listen. Some folks tried and had success; some didn't.

This year, I installed a nest box in a new location. It was immediately claimed by a male HOSP. I installed my shiny washers and expected him to be gone. Not so!! I moved the washers closer to the hole. No effect! I told this to my friends in VBS, Christine Boran in particular. She told me to get a Van Ert trap and use that. I got the trap and then said on the FaceBook site that when I caught the HOSP, I would take it to downtown Charlottesville where it would have lots of friends.

I was immediately shouted down! I was told that I would only be moving "the problem" to the city and not solving it. I am still pondering this. I find this hard from an ethical point of view. This bird's only crime is being born (hatched) as an invasive species, through no fault of its own. How can I feel good about killing it?

To end this story, I installed the Van Ert trap and immediately caught the HOSP. I had a bag that had been used to package oranges and put that over the nest box, in an attempt to catch the HOSP. The HOSP found a tiny opening and escaped. He has not been seen again and, within a few days, a pair of bluebirds was seen checking it out.

Following this set of events, a friend asked me to install a bluebird nest box for a neighbor who lives in the Woolen Mills area of Charlottesville. Since I do this regularly, I agreed. That box was immediately taken over by a HOSP. I told the property owner that we would have to trap the HOSP and dispose of it because it is an invasive species. She agreed.

As of today, I have not followed up. I am still left with this ethical dilemma of whether to kill a small bird because it is an invasive species. There has to be a better way forward. I am open to all ideas.

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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*. Email your materials to Judy Hall.

## The Bluebird Advisor

By Christine Boran and Anne Little



### Tree Swallow Ladders

**Q:** I have heard that a tree swallow ladder is important to have in a nest box. I am not sure what that means, and are they really important?

**A:** Tree swallow “ladders” are found inside the nest box right under the opening hole. It can either be cuts in the wood like a ladder, or a stapled piece of hardware cloth (wire mesh, commonly called chicken wire) affixed to the box under the entrance hole inside the box. Not only are “ladders” important, they are essential for preventing the tree swallows from being trapped inside the nest box with no means of escape. Just last week I was contacted by one of my monitors who found two adult tree swallows dead in the box. They had been trapped and died a horrible death. Tree swallows have wings that are much longer than bluebirds and are unable to flutter up to the entrance hole. They use the “ladder” to crawl out of the box if the box is too tight for them to flutter. Below is a picture of the inside of the box showing the swallow ladder. When we started VBS in the 1990s we did not have many tree swallows using our boxes. Studies on migration of tree swallows show that because of global warming, the tree swallows are now arriving up to two weeks earlier than in 1990. If the bluebirds have not laid eggs or hatched nestlings by the time the tree swallows arrive, the tree swallow is more aggressive and will take over the nest box from the bluebird. Tree swallows are native birds protected by Federal and State laws. You are not allowed to remove or disturb their nest in any way, just because you only want bluebirds. Pairing your nest boxes can solve



this problem. If you have a tree swallow take over your bluebird box, put a second box about 10 to 15 feet from the original box. The bluebird will nest in the second box and the two birds will nest side by side without disturbing each other. Two tree swallows or two bluebirds will not nest side by side, but a bluebird and tree swallow will. Please check all of your boxes when you monitor the next time and make sure that there are tree swallow ladders in all of your boxes. If there is not a ladder, the fastest and best way is to screw or staple a small piece of hardware cloth inside by the entrance hole.

*Do you have a question for the next newsletter's Bluebird Advisor? Send it to [woolwinehouse@gmail.com](mailto:woolwinehouse@gmail.com)*

*Inside a nest box showing the “ladder,” which is grooves cut into the wood under the opening. Hardware cloth can be stapled here instead of the grooves.*

*Photo by Anne Little*

## Mark Your Calendars

- August 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for fall newsletter
- November 16** VBS Bi-Annual Meeting/Conference at the Dorothy Hart Community Center, Fredericksburg.
- September** Collect trail data and send to county coordinator and/or Ann Dunn
- March 2020** **Save the date!** NABS Conference in Kearney, Nebraska. More information will be posted later at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org/](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/).

Check out our *Facebook* page <https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Bluebird-Society-133048243442687/> for photos and videos throughout the year, and follow us on *Twitter* at [https://twitter.com/VA\\_Bluebirds](https://twitter.com/VA_Bluebirds).

## 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 if you prefer a mailed 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 [birdboxeditor@gmail.com](mailto:birdboxeditor@gmail.com) by August 30 to be considered for the fall newsletter. Please include your location, identification of people and birds in photos, and name of photographer.*



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