

# The Bird Box Bird Box

Summer 2020 Newsletter of the  
Virginia Bluebird Society [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)



## Nestcam Success at Davis Elementary School

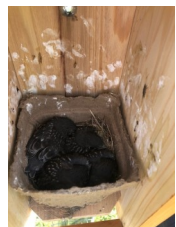
By Dottie Riley, ESL Teacher, A.M. Davis Elementary School, Chesterfield County

During February and March, Tony Daniel, Chesterfield County Coordinator and a Master Naturalist, set up two bluebird boxes next to the garden behind A. M. Davis Elementary School, both with brand new webcams. Then, because of the coronavirus pandemic, schools closed March 13.



The teachers who partnered with me, Colette Belden and Sheridan Thornhill, were so disappointed because the students wouldn't be able to view the bluebird life cycle. We have been fortunate to educate students for seven years with webcams donated by VBS, beginning with guidance from Lee and Jane Hesler. Lee, Jane, and I set up the boxes, and the Heslers were guest speakers for our Nature Buddies club. We sure do miss Lee, and think so much of Jane.

In early March, Ms. Belden's and Ms. Thornhill's classes had already been eagerly peering out of the windows and waiting for the bluebirds to build a nest. A couple were flying around so we knew it would happen soon.



Tony encouraged me to check the nests weekly. We opened the boxes together and reported to the school that chickadees laid five eggs in one box and bluebirds laid five eggs in the other box. Our Assistant Principal, Cynthia Patey, posted the news on the A. M. Davis Elementary Chesterfield County Facebook page, and the teachers engaged their classes with prediction videos on Flipgrid. I even received a phone call from a parent whose daughter was so excited to see the eggs, and another whose daughter wanted to bring the nestlings to her house.



Mrs. Patey posted the chickadee babies on Facebook on April 21, and posted that the chickadee nest was empty on May 12. She included a video of Ms. Thornhill and me showing the bluebird nest with fluffy, ready-to-fledge nestlings.

On May 18 both nests were empty. There are ten baby birds flying around A. M. Davis, and it's all thanks to the Virginia Bluebird Society. We'll see what happens next! We'll continue this project through the summer and share pictures with our community.

*Top left: Tony Daniel installing a nest box at A.M. Davis Elementary. Bottom left: Bluebird nestlings almost ready to fledge. Top right: A. M. Davis second grade teacher Sheridan Thornhill. Bottom right: A. M. Davis ESL teacher Dottie Riley. Photos by Dottie Riley*

## The Bird Box Bird Box

Inside This Issue	
Item	Page
Nestcam Success	1
Clark Walter Featured in C-Ville Weekly	1
Follow-Up Report on Experiment with Nest Box Trail	2
DIY Predator Guard	2
It Finally Happened to Me	3-4
Special Thanks	4-5
The Case for Indoor Cats	5-6
VBS State Coordinator Position Available	6
New Fact Sheet from NABS	6
The Bluebird Advisor	7
Mark Your Calendars	8
How To Join	8
Send An Article	8



## Clark Walter Featured in C-Ville Weekly

A long-time and prolific builder of nest boxes since 2011, Clark Walter has again been featured in a local newspaper, the C-Ville Weekly in Charlottesville, Virginia. Find the article at <https://www.c-ville.com/bluebird-man-ivy-volunteer-builds-houses-for-a-beloved-species/>.

Congratulations, Clark!

## Follow-up Report on Experiment with Nest Box Trail

By Doug Rogers, VBS Board member

In the fall issue of *The Bird Box*, I stated that my trail has been providing housing for too many Tree Swallows to suit me. I have tried the VBS protocol of pairing the boxes. I had 4 sets of paired boxes, with the boxes spaced about 15 feet or so apart in the areas that were affected the most. That worked for one year and for the past three years, all eight of those boxes were occupied by Tree Swallows.

On the suggestion of a friend who is a raptor researcher, I have reshaped my trail. I now have seven poles with two paired boxes each and six poles with one box each for a total of twenty boxes. The fourteen closely paired boxes are in the area most affected by Tree Swallows.

The result: as of May 5, I had 34 Bluebird nestlings in nest boxes, three had fledged and NO TREE SWALLOW nests! This is a new record for my trail. On the same date last year, I had four Bluebird nestlings and six Tree Swallow nests.



When I monitored the boxes on May 12, I had the following:

- 3 new Bluebird eggs
- 3 new Bluebird deaths (the female has disappeared, and the nestlings had no feathers.)
- 30 Bluebird babies that will fledge before I monitor again on May 19.
- 12 active nests
- 3 new Tree Swallow nests with a total of 11 eggs, and one of those Tree Swallow nests is in a box that is back-to-back with a box occupied by a Bluebird family, the first instance of Bluebird/Tree Swallow sharing closely paired boxes.

At this point my experiment is a success. I measure that success in terms of how many more Bluebird nestlings are in my boxes. This is not to say that everyone should adopt my plan. I

only say that it is working for my trail as of this date. In over 10 years of monitoring nest boxes, I have found that what works this year might not work next year and it might not work for nest boxes at other sites.

I am happy to respond to any questions or comments and happy to help anyone with their trail if it is reasonable to do so.

Along with that experiment, I found a hollow log on one of my walking trails and decided it would be fun to make 2 nest boxes out of it. The Bluebirds took to these boxes with no hesitation. They are larger and all natural. There is a downside; they are difficult to monitor. I have to use a little mirror on a long handle to see inside. But it has been good fun and that is part of why we do this!



Top right: Closely paired nest boxes with Tree Swallows

Top left: Paired nest boxes with Eastern Bluebirds..

Right: One section of a hollow log.

Left: Nest boxes constructed from the hollow log; roofs are made of cedar.

Photos by Doug Rogers



## DIY Predator Guard

By Mark Endries, Chesterfield, Virginia

Here is a new baffle design that I found from a YouTube video – Bluebird Predator Guards by Dean Rust, from [bluebirdconservation.com](http://bluebirdconservation.com). The video can be found at <https://youtu.be/RV9C9G4V5Mk>.

The baffle design starts with a five-gallon bucket with the handle removed, and a one-inch hole drilled in the center of the bottom. I used a tennis ball with an X cut in each side to hold the bucket in place on the pole, and ensured that the bucket could wobble. It is four feet from the ground to the top of the bucket. It is cheap and easy. The plastic bucket will break down in the sun over time, but should last five to six years.

In my 1.5 acre yard, I have two boxes with five eggs each, protected by these guards

*VBS Board Editorial Comment: If using a bucket (no smaller than standard 5-gallon utility size bucket from hardware store) that has a threaded rim (for use with a screw on lid) the rim must be cut off of the bucket. Otherwise, it provides a grab-hold for predators to climb up past the guard. As we recommend with the 8x24 stovepipe guards, install it with a wobble (not stationary) as high up from ground as possible but closely hanging under nest box. Make sure there are no gaps at the top around the drilled hole, so no small snakes can slip through.*



DIY predator baffle made from a five-gallon bucket.  
Photo by Mark Endries



## It Finally Happened to Me

By Kathy Laine, Scottsburg, Virginia

I had heard about it from others. I had seen their pictures. However, it had never happened to me. But one day, it finally did—a House Sparrow killed birds nesting in my yard. Through an open window, I heard the familiar, annoying, “Chirrup, chirrup, chirrup” of a male House Sparrow. Knowing the danger these non-native birds pose for our native cavity-nesting species, I rushed to see where he was. To my horror, he was clinging to the entrance hole of the nest box in my backyard where a pair of Carolina Chickadees was raising their family of seven adorable nestlings, eleven days old.

I went outside and carefully peeked into the box. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that the babies were fine. I was hosting many native birds on my 5-acre property—an overflowing Purple Martin colony with thirteen families, two families of Eastern Bluebirds, three families of Tree Swallows, and this family of Chickadees; therefore, I had many adult birds, eggs, and babies to guard from danger. House Sparrows are a threat because they commonly enter the nests of native birds and peck them to death. They scalp the parents, peck out babies’ eyes, sever their spinal cords, and often throw them out of the box onto the ground. Sometimes they injure the babies and leave them in the nest, smother them with nest material, and



*The Carolina Chickadee nest the day before the attack; nestlings are eleven days old*

build their own nest on top of the baby birds while they are still alive. I feel that if I am going to draw wild birds to my property, offering feeders and man-made nesting places, it is my responsibility to do all I can to protect them from predators and non-native competitors. Therefore, I immediately went to work, trying to trap the House Sparrow. There are no laws protecting non-native bird species, so trapping and shooting are legal. I set out a ground bait trap, and placed several spare nest boxes on a nearby wall, in hopes of distracting him—luring him away from the chickadee box and its helpless babies. I could later capture him in those boxes, if he bonded to one of them. However, he would not enter the bait trap and ignored the additional empty boxes.

The next day, I heard the House Sparrow’s chirping, looked out, and saw him clinging to the front of the chickadee box—and then he dove into it! I raced outside, grabbing my nylon laundry bag along the way, hoping to throw it over the box and capture him; I also grabbed an entrance hole plug, to prevent premature fledging of the babies inside. But the sparrow heard me coming and flew out of the box. I plugged the entrance hole and quietly lifted the side panel of the box, fearing what I might find inside the box. It was too late; that was not the first time that sparrow had been in



*One nestling pecked by House Sparrow and thrown out on ground*

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

build their own nest on top of the baby birds while they are still alive. I feel that if I am going to draw wild birds to my property, offering feeders and man-made nesting places, it is my responsibility to do all I can to protect them from predators and non-native competitors. Therefore, I immediately went to work, trying to trap the House Sparrow. There are no laws protecting non-native bird species, so trapping and shooting are legal. I set out a ground bait trap, and placed several spare nest boxes on a nearby wall, in hopes of distracting him—luring him away from the chickadee box and its helpless babies. I could later capture him in those boxes, if he bonded to one of them. However, he would not enter the bait trap and ignored the additional empty boxes.

The next day, I heard the House Sparrow’s chirping, looked out, and saw him clinging to the front of the chickadee box—and then he dove into it! I raced outside, grabbing my nylon laundry bag along the way, hoping to throw it over the box and capture him; I also grabbed an entrance hole plug, to prevent premature fledging of the babies inside. But the sparrow heard me coming and flew out of the box. I plugged the entrance hole and quietly lifted the side panel of the box, fearing what I might find inside the box. It was too late; that was not the first time that sparrow had been in

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

that box. He had already killed the Momma chickadee. He had torn up the nest; I couldn’t even see the babies. I removed the cardboard nesting cup, pulled back the nesting material and found the babies under it—buried alive! They would have suffocated and starved to death. The sparrow had injured one of them (pecked its head), and although all of the nestlings looked weak, they were moving. I found a bruised and bloody nestling thrown out onto the ground—dead. Ants were on it, so I knew the murder had been committed last evening or earlier that morning, because all of the babies were fine when I checked on them the previous afternoon. I was deeply saddened. However, this did not come as a surprise to me. I had read many reports of how these little brown birds that peck at food scraps in parking lots have killed many native birds in their nest boxes. I could hear a chickadee scolding in the woods; I hoped that was the Daddy chickadee. I pulled back all the nest material so he could see and feed the chicks, and placed the nest back in the box; I could only hope he would return to care for the babies and attempt to raise them—alone. It would be a tough job, but they would fledge in a few days—IF the sparrow didn’t come back and kill the Daddy, too.

I worked on implementing other ways to stop this aggressive little bird. I mounted a trapping nest box within sight of that box, and repeatedly looked out my windows for any sign of the sparrow. Within less than ten minutes of hanging that trap, I was able to capture the House Sparrow, and he was humanely euthanized, so he could never again kill another native bird. I left the traps in place, in case another House Sparrow was in the area. Thankfully, Daddy Chickadee returned to the nest box, found his surviving babies, and worked very hard to raise them—and all of the nestlings successfully fledged! About two weeks later, another male and a female House Sparrow appeared and were captured in the ground bait trap.

I typically do not have many House Sparrows in my area—but it only takes one. Aggressive control is needed, if we want to aid in the conservation of native birds, doing what we can to protect our native birds. Relocation of non-native birds doesn’t usually work—they typically fly back to our area. Even if they don’t, relocating an invasive, destructive



*Female Chickadee on rim of nest, killed by House Sparrow*

creature is like dumping our garbage into our neighbor's yard. Doing nest tear-outs of House Sparrow nests doesn't work, either; unless the sparrow who built the nest can be eliminated, it often returns and rebuilds its nest, and/or it kills native species who try to nest there. Even worse, nest tear-outs often incite House Sparrow Revenge Syndrome, where the House Sparrow finds the nearest nest of a native cavity-nester and kills those birds—or destroys eggs and/or babies of multiple nests at a Purple Martin colony. House Sparrows even kill when they already have their own nest of young, elsewhere. They are not simply trying to find a home and survive—they kill other species to reduce future competition for nest sites.

Some will not agree with a proactive approach to managing non-native species. Each birder must decide to what extent they will go in safeguarding native species. God did not place House Sparrows or European Starlings in the U.S. — humans brought them here from Europe. North American bird species are vulnerable, because they did not evolve with these imported pest species and cannot successfully compete with them, as the other bird species in Europe can. The House Sparrow's powerful beak is deadly to our native birds that cannot adequately defend themselves. I do not take pleasure in capturing, shooting, or euthanizing any creature, and I only use humane procedures. If we desire to help native birds to be as productive as possible, it requires moxie. I was asked to share my experience, so others can see the damage House Sparrows do—and learn what can be done to reduce harm to our native birds.

This experience also demonstrates the importance of monitoring. It is unlikely that the Daddy chickadee would have been able to uncover his buried babies to feed them, if I had not taken action. The House Sparrow probably would have killed the Daddy, and the other babies would have suffocated and starved, if I had felt that opening nest boxes to check on birds would disturb them too much. If I had "let nature take its course," nine precious native birds would have suffered and died—needlessly. Monitoring helps save the lives of native birds. Willing and observant caretakers can protect our native birds, intervening and coming to their aid when they desperately need our help.

## Special Thanks

**With grateful appreciation to the following 2020/2021 Sustaining and Endowment members for their support of VBS:**

### Endowment Members

Curtis Backus  
 Patricia Beauregard  
 Gary Bradford  
 Sheila Byrd  
 Renate and Ted Chapman  
 Ulrike (Ika) Joiner  
 Gary Knipling  
 Vickie Matheis  
 Adrienne Stefan  
 Monticello Bird Club

### Sustaining Members

Mark Adrian  
 Angela Amos  
 Joanne and David Bauer  
 Susan Bender  
 Chris Browning  
 Ann Dunn  
 Lucy Ellett  
 Donna Finnegan  
 Ronald Grimes  
 Robert and Jennifer Katt  
 Regina Klemt  
 Anne and Carl Little  
 John and Deb Markham  
 Catherine McNichols  
 Carol Priner  
 Suzanne Miller and Tony Quezon  
 Doug Rogers and Joanne Bricker  
 Bill Talty  
 Paul and Sandra Uhler  
 Augusta Bird Club  
 Hampton Roads Bird Club

AYR Hill Garden Club

### With grateful appreciation to the following 2020/2021 Bluebird Nest Box Sponsors:

Ana Maria Allard  
 Terry Bennett  
 Bonnie Bernstein  
 Gary Bradford  
 D. Brinkely  
 Hank Burchard  
 Renate and Ted Chapman  
 Fred Doering  
 Darryl Foytik  
 Daniel and Vickie Fuquay  
 Walter Hussey  
 Harry and Stephanie Jones  
 Tiffany Lee  
 Eileen Lorenz  
 Kathi Marshall  
 Peggy Martin  
 Louise Ott  
 Norma Jean Rist  
 Adrienne Stefan  
 Margaret Wester  
 Caroline Williams  
 Hampton Roads Bird Club

### We are also grateful to the following donors for their generous contributions in support of our mission:

Lorrie and Gordon Aitken  
 Donald Akers

Judith Albert  
 James and Beverly Arnold  
 Ursula Baxley  
 Terry Bennett  
 Mike and Sheila Bishop  
 Robyn Boggs  
 Judith Booker  
 Martha Sue Boyd  
 Ricklin Brown  
 Sheree Brown  
 Vivian Bruzese  
 Frank Burroughs, Jr.  
 Sheila Byrd  
 Carol Caplan  
 Larry Cartwright  
 Marilyn Chalmers  
 Renate and Ted Chapman  
 Anne Crocker  
 Paul Davis  
 Janet Doerr  
 Mary Dorsey-Lee  
 Jean Duffie  
 Lucy Ellett  
 Ben Esh  
 Hyland Fowler, Jr.  
 Darryl Foytik  
 Barbara Fuhrman  
 Valerie Kenyon Gaffney  
 Kent Giles and Celeste Land  
 Anna Goddard  
 Bill Gorewich and Donna Reece  
 Renee Grebe  
 Jane and Bruce Greyson  
 Margaret Grieshaber

*Continued on page 5*

## Special Thanks, continued from page 4

### Bluebird Box Sponsors, continued

Debra Harrison	Janet Paisley	Sandy Weber
Martha Hayes	Joyce Palm	Durie and Donald White
Kyle and Susanne Helsel	Landan Paul	Frank and Patricia Wilczek
Jane Hesler	Eileen Parlow	Caroline D. Williams
John and Ann Humphrey	Michael Powell	Carolyn Williams
Annette Iannucci	Lynne Ratz	Alfred Wilson III
Lucinda Jennings	Camille Reilly	W. B. Wingo
Sandy Jeter	Karen Huleback and Joseph Rodricks (Hulebak-Rodricks Foundation)	Thomas Witt, Jr.
Harry and Stephanie Jones	Leah Samuels	Bob Wybraniec
Timothy Kidd	Glenn and Alice Shelton	Donna Zadnik
Joella Killian	Adrienne Stefan	Fredericksburg Birding Club
Josephine King	Randy Streufert	King George Garden Club
Gary Knipling	Anne Sturm	Wild Birds Unlimited
Linda Langdon	Barbara and John Suval	Roanoke Valley Bird Club
Robert Lawrence	William Talty	Historic Rivers Chapter Virginia Master Naturalists
Billie Lester	Roger and Pat Temples	<b>Gifts In Memoriam</b>
Anne and Carl Little	Victoria Thompson	Sandra Hausman, in memory of Priscilla Kingston
Eileen Lorenz	Leonard Thornton	Faith Loeb and Pickleball Group, in memory of Sandra Teony-Rodin
Charles Mackall	David Torborg	Gregory Hoffman, in memory of Sandra Teony-Rodin
Deirdre MacNeil	John and Susan Turner Fund	Joan Canfield, in memory of John Trott
Colleen Maitland	Sandra and Paul Uhler	
James Moore	Vince Ventimiglia	
Chris Morin	Linda Wagner	
Barney and Mary O'Meara	Elizabeth Walker	
Carl Otto		

## The Case for Indoor Cats

### Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, VBS President

It was a lovely, Monday morning in May 2007. Intending to pick up flowerpots left outside from the day before, I went into my backyard and absentmindedly failed to pull the sliding glass door behind me. In the blink of an eye, my beloved cat Emily was gone! For three weeks, Emily was both predator and prey. Eat, or be eaten? I was frantic and inconsolable. Eventually, Emily was found alive and well, brought home, and lived out the rest of her twenty-two years within the safe confines of my home. I know Emily lived a long and healthy life because she was, for all but those three weeks, strictly an indoor cat. Likewise, I believe the songbirds that grace my backyard were for the ensuing thirteen years far safer for that same reason. We lived in peaceful coexistence.

Research published in *Science* in 2019 shows “bird populations have continued to plummet in the past five decades, dropping by nearly three billion across North American – an overall decline of 29 percent from 1970.” (*Science* 04 Oct 2019: Vol 336, Issue 6461, pp. 120-124)

I do not believe free roaming cats—either house cats who go outside on occasion or feral cat colonies—are wholly to blame for this decline in bird populations. Research indicates the biggest cause of bird population decline is loss of habitat. So, what can we do about the loss of habitat? The Virginia Bluebird Society, along with many other conservation organizations, works diligently to address that problem. Indeed, second in our organization’s stated goals: Establish and support a statewide network of bluebird trails.

But what about cats? According to Cornell University’s website AllAboutBirds.org, “Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.4 billion birds annually in the U.S and are the No. 1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.” Cats are natural predators. It’s in their genes to hunt and not always because they’re hungry, as evidenced by the occasional dead mouse brought up from your basement.

If you have a hard time accepting Cornell’s estimates, the National Wildlife Federation suggests, “Of the 73 million pet cats in the U.S., an estimated 40 million roam outside unsupervised. Throw in feral cats and as many as 100 million cats are on the loose. These cats could easily be killing 100 million songbirds a year.”

And what about the health of your cat? Again, from Allaboutbirds.org: “Outdoor cats can contract or transmit diseases and parasites including toxoplasmosis, rabies, feline leukemia, feline herpes, tapeworms and fleas. An outdoor cat lives less than half as long on average as an indoor cat.” And as if that weren’t danger enough, according to the Humane Society of the United States, “Millions of cats are killed by motor vehicles annually. In Washington, D.C. vehicles are the number one reason for injury, followed by fights with wild animals like racoons. Even in ‘safe’ situations, cats may curl up in car engines, ingest poison or come in contact with cats that carry fatal diseases.”

Bottom line, cats aren’t safe in nature, and as long as cats are allowed to roam wild, birds aren’t safe either.

Continued on Page 6



Continued from page 5

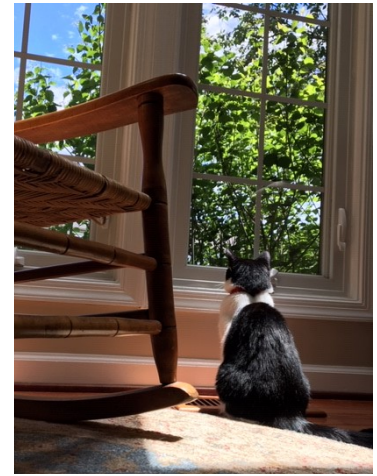
I have a precious new cat, Eleanor Rigby. She's just four years old; a rescue off of the streets of Woodbridge, Virginia. I fully expect her to live a very long and very happy life. She's welcome to stalk the birds from inside the kitchen windows. And the birds are always welcome entertainment for her and me as they safely visit our backyard feeders and bird bath. It's a win/win!

How about you? Will you protect the birds from death by cat, and protect your beloved cat from death by the dangers of the outdoors?

For additional reading: *Cat Wars*, by Peter P. Marra and Chris Santella, Princeton University Press, 2016.

Right: Eleanor Rigby watching the birds from inside the house.

Photo by Valerie Kenyon Gaffney



## VBS State Coordinator Position Available

The Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) is looking for an outgoing, highly motivated individual, a Master Naturalist, someone with comparable experience, or someone with extensive bluebird knowledge, to serve as **Part Time State Coordinator**.

While working in close cooperation with the VBS president, the primary responsibility of this position is to provide assistance to the county coordinators, including advising on nest box trail monitoring, volunteer recruitment, PR, and outreach. The bulk of the work will be phoning and emailing the county coordinators, which requires excellent oral and written communication skills. Successful candidate must be available for occasional travel, conducting regional county coordinator meetings for the purpose of information sharing and addressing county coordinator issues and concerns. Will be responsible for identifying and recruiting volunteers to fill existing and future county coordinator vacancies.

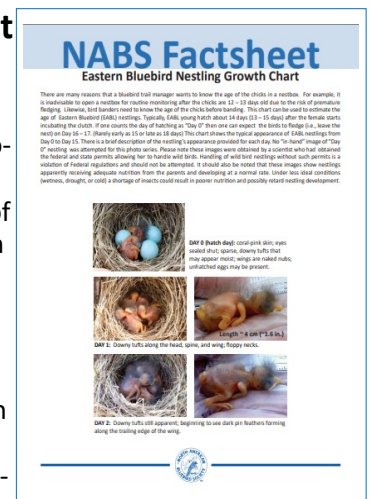
Previously a volunteer position, the growth of VBS makes apparent the need for a paid position. There are no set hours for this position. The salary is budgeted at \$2500 (125 hours at \$20 per hour) plus mileage expenses.

If you are interested in this position or would like more information, please send your questions and/or resume to Valerie Kenyon Gaffney at [vk3105@gmail.com](mailto:vk3105@gmail.com).

## New FACT SHEET from NABS—Eastern Bluebird Nestling Growth Chart

By Christine Boran, Board Member, Virginia Bluebird Society and North American Bluebird Society

The Virginia Bluebird Society (VBS) is an affiliate organization of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). NABS recently announced the completion of a new four-page color brochure of the NABS Fact Sheet, *Eastern Bluebird Nestling Growth Chart*. The brochure shows day-by-day photos and descriptions of development from hatching day, which is Day Zero of age, to Day 15+ of age, near fledging age. The photos demonstrate in detail the nestlings on the nest and outside of the nest for excellent views of typical development by age. The growth chart images and descriptions were created by Laura Palmer, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University Department of Biology, under the auspices of the North American Bluebird Society Joseph A. Kujanik Education Grant. NABS also provides fact sheets on other aspects of bluebirding, such as building and mounting nest boxes, as well as detailed information on how to monitor nest boxes and how to cope with problems one typically encounters on a bluebird trail, such as predators, house sparrows, heat, rain, and cold. Also included are recommendations on what to look for in a nest box design, nest box plans, how to start as a new bluebirder, and FAQs on various topics. Individuals who join NABS receive a glossy copy of each of all available NABS Fact Sheets, as well as the quality full-color quarterly journal *Bluebird*, which is filled with tips and stories from other bluebirders, as well as updates on research and other items of interest to nest box trail monitors.



Find the new Nestling Growth Chart online at <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/EABL%20Nesting%20Growth%20Chart.pdf>

All bluebird monitors should have this in their trail binders to accurately help determine the age of the nestlings. This will assist when determining that critical thirteenth day of age and know when to stop opening nest boxes to deter premature fledging of bluebird young.

Find all available PDF NABS Fact Sheets on the NABS web site here: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/nabs-fact-sheets/>

Information on how to join NABS: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/membership-individuals/>



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

Our email address is:  
[vbs@virginiabluebirds.org](mailto:vbs@virginiabluebirds.org)  
 If you have a new email address, or have recently changed it, please let us know.

**Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, President**  
 (c) 703-973-9194  
 email: [vkg3105@gmail.com](mailto:vkg3105@gmail.com)

**Vickie Fuquay, Vice President, Education**  
 (c) 434-822-0930  
 email: [vickiefuquay@comcast.net](mailto:vickiefuquay@comcast.net)

**Lexi Meadows, Vice President,  
 Membership and Trails**  
 (c) 434-251-4407  
 email: [meadows9@rsnet.org](mailto:meadows9@rsnet.org)

**Sandy Jeter, Secretary**  
 (c) 703-867-3444  
 email: [sanmar02@aol.com](mailto:sanmar02@aol.com)

**Mary Lohman, Treasurer**  
 (c) 703-994-9196  
 email: [mllohman@yahoo.com](mailto:mllohman@yahoo.com)

**Directors:**

**Mike Bishop** (c) 703-927-7781  
 email: [mwbishop@coxnet.net](mailto:mwbishop@coxnet.net)

**Christine Boran** (c) 276-229-8648  
 email: [woolwinehouse@gmail.com](mailto:woolwinehouse@gmail.com)

**Jane Hesler** (c) 434-996-0139  
 email: [jane.hesler@gmail.com](mailto:jane.hesler@gmail.com)

**Ron Kingston** (h) 434-962-8232  
 email: [Bluebirdsforever@yahoo.com](mailto:Bluebirdsforever@yahoo.com)

**Doug Rogers** (h) 434-973-7634  
 email: [birdphotog76@gmail.com](mailto:birdphotog76@gmail.com)

**Past President**

**Cathy Hindman** (h) 703-590-0715  
 email: [cathy20112@gmail.com](mailto:cathy20112@gmail.com)

**Data Manager**

**Ann Dunn**, (h) 434-296-3496  
 email: [amddunn@gmail.com](mailto:amddunn@gmail.com)

**State Coordinator**

**Position Open, Seeking Applicants**

**The Bird Box Editor**

**Judy Hall**, (h) 804-790-0437  
 email: [birdboxeditor@gmail.com](mailto:birdboxeditor@gmail.com)

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



### Hatchling Disappearance

**Q:** Do parent bluebirds remove deceased young from the nest?

**A:** Sometimes yes and sometimes no. If the deceased is small enough, a parent bird (probably Mom) will remove it. Rarely do I see deceased nestlings younger than 4-5 days old on a nest. The [Sialis.org](http://Sialis.org) website mentions that parent bluebirds can remove dead nestlings under ten grams. Not all parent birds will remove their dead—sometimes a tiny deceased hatchling can be hidden under larger nestlings as they grow and will get tamped down into the nest material. If that happens and a larger nestling is on top, perhaps the parent cannot remove it. We will not see that until we clean out the box and remove the fledged nest. Once they are larger and heavier, the parents cannot lift them out of the box nor will they fit through the hole. I have had nests on my trail where I arrived on hatch day and saw evidence of all having hatched. Then I come back in 5 - 7 days, and one hatchling is missing, but all other nestlings are doing fine. To me, that is not a predator issue, but parent birds are keeping the nest clean and removed the dead hatchling, just as they clean the nest by removing the fecal sacs. I did witness once as I approached a box, Mom bluebird trying to pull out a young dead nestling about four days old. She was able to get half of it out of the hole but could not remove it further and flew off when she saw me. It was draped on the outside of the hole—head and neck outside the box and the larger part of its body inside the box—obviously too difficult for her to get it out. I took a photo for my records. The other nestlings inside, partially feathered, were alive but in bad shape and all eventually perished from hypothermia or starvation due to repeat days of cold temperatures and heavy rains. Many of us may have lost nestlings to this type of weather in Virginia. Food for thought: in natural cavities, such as old woodpecker holes, which are generally larger than the standard bluebird entry hole size, would a parent bluebird,



Healthy eight-day-old Eastern Bluebird nestlings, taken on May 28, 2020.  
 Photo by Christine Boran

chickadee, or tree swallow be able to remove a deceased nestling from that natural cavity? I am thinking the likelihood of doing so is greater than from our nest boxes with 1.5 inch holes. This is probably easier for the open-cup nesting birds in shrubs and treetops, as well.

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

## Mark Your Calendars

**June and July** Continue monitoring nest boxes; check for parasites such as wasps, blowflies, and ants

**August 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for fall newsletter

**September** Collect trail data and send to county coordinator and/or Ann Dunn

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. Have you taken great photos? Has your kindergartner drawn a cute bluebird? Submit materials to Judy Hall, Editor, at [bird-boxeditor@gmail.com](mailto:bird-boxeditor@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 or artist.*



**Virginia Bluebird Society  
726 William Street  
Fredericksburg VA 22401**