

The Bird Box Bird Box

Summer 2021 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org



Twenty-five Plus One

That's how we'll be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Virginia Bluebird Society. After very careful consideration and taking into account that no venues were willing to commit in March to hosting a conference this November, the board decided to postpone our biennial conference from November 2021 to November 2022. And lest you question why we didn't pivot (after COVID-19, the 2020 word of the year) to hosting a virtual conference, as many organizations have decided to do, this one - our 25th anniversary - is just too big a deal to be Zoomed. We want to be able to meet in person and truly celebrate this milestone with very special speakers, educational programs, and opportunities for networking.

It's not too early to mark your calendar and save the date: Twenty-five Plus One, the weekend of **November 12, 2022**. But you should also mark your calendars for 10:00 a.m., **November 13, 2021**.

That's the date of our annual meeting and it will be via Zoom. We will be electing new officers and directors and will be voting on changes to our bylaws. Formal notification of the annual meeting will be emailed to members in October.

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First Annual Bluebird Photo Contest

By Tony Daniel, Chesterfield

In March, Virginia Bluebird Society kicked off a Facebook photo contest in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of our founding. It was a great success, and it is exciting to know that there are so many who love bluebirds and who are so talented at capturing them in photos. It was great to see our beloved bluebirds in flight, taking care of fledglings, at feeders, perched, and even in the snow! Fifty-six photos were submitted and bracketed, and voting was then conducted by Facebook followers liking their favorite of two photos. Thanks to everyone who participated and congratulations to the winners. (See the winning photos on page 2.)

Mark Guill's first place prize was a bag of 5000 meal worms donated by Nature's Way. No doubt Mark will get more shots of his Eastern Bluebirds enjoying the prize.

We look forward to holding another contest next year, and encourage everyone to start taking photos so they will be ready for the next competition. Even with the contest over for this year, we still want to see your photos. Please share to the Virginia Bluebird Society Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/virginiabluebirdsociety/> so everyone can enjoy them.

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Left: First Place Winner
Mark Guill, Danville, Virginia
Bluebird Portrait
5,000 live mealworms donated by **Nature's Way** (<http://www.thenaturesway.com>)

Right: Second Place Winner
Roxane St. John, Concord, Virginia
Bluebird and Berries

Signed copy of Julie Zickefoose's *The Bluebird Effect: Uncommon Bonds with Common Birds*



Left: Third Place Winner
Karen Taylor, Manassas, Virginia
Snowy Perch

One-year membership in **Virginia Bluebird Society**



Right:
Fourth Place Winner
Deborah Humphries, Williamsburg, Virginia
Nestbuilding With Style

One-year membership in Virginia Bluebird Society



Sky Meadows State Park Bluebird Trail Ten Year Anniversary

By Margaret Wester, Trail Manager

The formation of the bluebird trail at Sky Meadows State Park is a story of collaboration and cooperation between several organizations and a host of volunteers with the Shenandoah Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists at the heart. In the fall of 2010, then park manager Timothy Skinner approached our chapter at a meeting, proposing that we revitalize a bluebird nesting trail at the park. Since I already had many years of experience monitoring the Shenandoah Audubon bluebird trail at Blandy Experimental Farm with Kaycee Lichliter, trail manager, I thought this would be a dream project for me. In 2008, I became a certified member of our VMN chapter, formed in 2007.

Tim had already presented us with nine donated nest boxes. With Tom Adkins, I organized volunteers for two work days at the park's maintenance workshop to build 40 Carl Little nest boxes, stovepipe snake guards, and Noel guards, all according to plans available on the Virginia Bluebird Society website. The park supplied the raw materials.



Team members Tom Adkins, Bill Meeker, Laura Linn, John Harris, Margaret Wester. And Michael Wilson complete Box #1 in March, 2011.

Photo by Timothy Skinner

As this was in progress, I was approached by scoutmaster Karl Haas who had a scout, Anthony Fala, seeking to earn his Eagle Scout badge. It was agreed that Anthony would provide and install 20 nest boxes with his troop. He sought and received funding from VBS for all of the materials for these nest boxes, and coordinated locations with me. The locations for all of the new nest boxes were laid out with flags and approved by the park manager. We selected sites according to habitat, safety from predators, and recommended distance between boxes, plus locations available from the park in accordance with park operations and policies. We installed some trail sections in pairs and some singularly. Our original trail consisted of 69 nest boxes divided up into six trail sections for monitoring, and we completed installation just in time for the nesting season of 2011.

The next step was recruiting and training volunteers for monitoring.

There were no problems finding volunteers. Everyone in our chapter was excited about this project. I teamed up with Kaycee Lichliter to train the new volunteers, since she already had a training program in place for the Shenandoah Audubon Blandy bluebird trail volunteers. We adopted the same protocol, project manual, and data log sheets being used for the Blandy trail, but modified to fit Sky Meadows. This way we generated trail technicians who could volunteer to monitor for both Sky Meadows, Blandy, and other Shenandoah Audubon bluebird trails. I coordinate every year with Kaycee on training and scheduling of the volunteers for our two sister trails.

Over the years we have added new nest boxes to the trail to finish off or expand a trail section. In 2017-2018 we installed new nest boxes with plaques to honor volunteers with our chapter who had completed ten years of volunteer service, and we continue this practice annually as chapter members reach this mark. In 2020, before the 2021 nesting season started, we completed a renovation of the entire trail replacing worn out nest boxes and guards, and relocating of some nest boxes. We currently have 96 nest boxes on our trail. Bob Edmonds, certified chapter member, has been the trail maintenance technician from the start and headed up this renovation project. We have plans to install four more nest boxes next year for an even 100.

We are proud of our beautiful bluebird trail and our accomplishments. To date we have fledged 2,088 Eastern Bluebirds, 1,736 Tree Swallows, 84 House Wrens, and 60 Carolina Wrens. We collect all of the data from the trail logbook sheets entered by volunteers as they monitor the trails, compile it, and report the results to VBS on their spreadsheet document annually. This bluebird trail would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of many volunteers, collaboration with the park, building on the experience and expertise of others, and resources from the Virginia Bluebird Society and other conservation organizations. As a project of our chapter, the trail is now



Newly hatched bluebirds on the Sky Meadows State Park bluebird trail.

Photo by Mady Tobias



Ed Tobias filling out the trail book data sheet as he monitors.

Photo by Mady Tobias

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fully funded and supported by our VMN Shenandoah Chapter.

As I enter the park to take up an afternoon of monitoring or checking the trail books, I am always pleased to see the bluebirds and swallows flying, perching, hunting, and entering or exiting the nest boxes, busy at their work, accomplishing what our nest box trail was designed for.

Baby Blues Get a Second Chance

By Vickie Fuquay, VBS Vice President, Education

This spring I got a call from a very observant bluebird landlord. Debbie Haley has several bluebird houses, monitors them regularly, and feeds her bluebirds live mealworms a couple of times per day. On April 21, she went out to feed her bluebirds as usual and didn't see either parent, but didn't think much of it. When she returned for the evening feeding again neither parent showed up, but she could hear very loud hungry babies protesting in the box. She watched until almost dark and decided to try to feed the babies. They ate hungrily before they quieted down, then she called me. These nestlings were about twelve days old.

We were expecting freezing temperatures for the night, so I advised her to place the nest in a shoe box and bring the babies in where they would be warm, then try feeding the parents again in the morning, and if no parents showed up, to call me. Here is where a bluebird network of trails is so important. I sent out a mass email to my local monitors, asking if anyone had boxes with babies about the same age. I got lots of replies but each box with babies the appropriate age had five or six babies already.

One monitor had boxes at her house with babies close enough in age, and luckily one box that had two baby blues and the other box had three. On April 22, I drove out to her house with a shoe box full of baby blues creating quite a fuss with every bump in the road. Joy Trimble was waiting for my delivery. We added three babies to her box that had two fourteen-day-old babies. She put out mealworms and we watched as papa flew to the box and looked in; he had just gone from three to five mouths to feed, and he didn't miss a beat. The second box held two babies each eight days old; we added three and waited to see. Both parents began feeding right away. Joy was generous with her mealworms to help supplement the parents with the added five mouths to feed.

Sadly, the female of the first box disappeared, but papa continued to feed as Joy watched and observed his care for the babies. Four days after the orphan babies were placed, the three original nestlings fledged. Those fledglings stayed nearby as daddy blue continued to feed the two orphans still in the box, as well as the three fledglings. The orphans successfully fledged three days later on April 29.

The second box had both parents feeding. The three orphans fledged on May 1, and the original two babies followed on May 3. Thanks to Debbie's watchful eye for observing that she had bluebird orphans, and for Joy's willingness to assist, all babies thrived and fledged. Joy had the privilege of seeing each baby fledge while she was working from home.



It's a Big World Out Here:

Orphaned and adopted bluebird about to fledge.

Photo by Joy Trimble

Sister (Bluebird) Wives in Reston

By Helaine Krob, Fairfax County

Here's a fun little bluebird story about our nest box in our back yard about twenty feet from our deck. In April, our son Noah was assigned a demonstration speech for his college Spanish class and selected "How to Monitor Bluebirds." We saw the female building the nest that week, so we assumed he'd at least have a nest to show his classmates.

On April 17, Noah recorded his presentation at the nest box. He spoke to the box (en español) to alert the female to his presence, and she flew out of the box. He opened the box, and much to our surprise, another female flew out of the side door (a hole made by a Downy Woodpecker). He continued his "how to" presentation and counted nine eggs!

We watched the box for the next few days and realized that both females were in there brooding the eggs. The devoted male continued to bring food to the box throughout the day. We knew there were two females in there because sometimes both would fly out of the box if there were any disturbances, like Noah's presentation, or people talking on our deck.



Above: Nine bluebird eggs in one nest

Photo by Helaine Krob

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Sister (Bluebird) Wives, Continued from page 4

When returning to the box, one female preferred the side hole. The other entered by the Noel guard opening. This is how we could tell the two females apart.

The male fed both females during brooding, and on May 1, eight of the nine eggs hatched. We were thrilled, but concerned that they wouldn't have enough room. The greater concern was whether they could get enough food. There is not a lot of information about this situation. We researched clutch size, and egg dumping, when a second female lays eggs in an established nest, to see if it would be possible for them all to survive. The Sialis.org site explained, "There have been rare reports of two female bluebirds laying their eggs and rearing their young in one nest."

Luckily, that's what happened. The three parents were amazing. They took multiple turns from dawn to dusk feeding the young.

The male liked to bring cicada grubs; the cicadas hadn't emerged yet. The two females brought all manner of other insects. The parents had worked out a plan, taking turns entering the box. While the first parent was in the box feeding the young, the second parent waited on the dogwood tree in our yard, about ten feet from the box. The third parent waited in a maple along the pond. When parent one left the box (removing a fecal sac each time), parent two would leave the dogwood, enter the box, and feed the young. Parent three would leave the maple and land in the dogwood, waiting its turn. This went on, dawn to dusk, every day until the young fledged. During this time, my husband Mark and I considered adding an extension to give them added space, but we observed all eight happily sleeping, and they seemed healthy, so we decided against altering the box.



Above: Male bluebird with cicada, waiting his turn in the dogwood tree.

Left: Females taking turns feeding

Below: Male feeding both females

Photos by Helaine Krob



We stopped checking the box on May 15, when the hatchlings were fourteen days old, close to fledging. By May 18, the box had gotten very quiet, the male was gone, and the two females would occasionally arrive and sit in the dogwood. They would face away, looking over their shoulders to look at the box and call. We assumed they were trying to coax the young out of the box. We saw one fledgling poking his head out. We didn't realize his seven siblings had already fledged and he was the last little one.

The next day, the females were gone and we assumed the nestlings had fledged. We checked the box on May 20 (young are 19 days old). The empty nest was pressed flat; the box walls were quite messy, and the unhatched egg must have been removed. But all eight nestlings had safely fledged.

And as of June 17, there are seven new eggs in a new nest in the box.

(Editor's note: "Sister Wives, Bluebird Style," in the Spring 2019 issue of *The Bird Box*, available on the Virginia Bluebird Society website tells of there two females as well as two males raising their brood in the same box. The next brood in that box had one female and five eggs.)



Special Thanks

With grateful appreciation to the following 2021/2022 Sustaining and Endowment members for their support of VBS:

Endowment Members

John Alderson
Tim Anderson
Curtis Backus
Fredric and Anne Betz
Vivian Bruzzese
Ted and Renate Chapman
Karen Hulebak
Robert and Jennifer Katt
Garth Kemper
Gary Knipling
Paula Parsons
Ann Elise Sauer
Donna F. Vinal
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Randy Streufert
David and Karen Timer
Imogene Treble
Sherri Wright
Augusta Bird Club

Sustaining Members, continued

Ayr Hill Garden Club
Friends of Natural Bridge State Park
Hampton Roads Bird Club
Rockfish Valley Foundation

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Sandy Weber
Sue Weis
Ray Welch
Janet Wheatcraft
Donald and Durie White
Carolyn D. Williams
Alfred Wilson, III
Thomas Witt, Jr.
Virginia Master Naturalists Historic
Rivers Chapter
Wilson Realty LLC
Thomas and Debbie Yencha



Member Photos

*First five Eastern Bluebirds in Lynchburg.
Photo by Nora Cox*

New Lesson Plans for Integrating Bluebird Observations in Fourth Grade Classrooms

On April 14, Charlene Talcott, State Coordinator for Virginia Bluebird Society, received a grant to create lesson plans to use with the nest box cameras provided to schools by VBS. These plans correlate with Virginia Fourth Grade Science Standards of Learning, and comprise nine lessons. By following the lessons, students will observe parents establishing and raising a brood, make predictions on the number of eggs and hatchlings fledged, graph the types and amounts of food consumed, evaluate the designs of nest boxes and predator guards, and learn about the habitat niche of nesting Eastern Bluebirds. By using these lesson plans, teachers can bring real-life situations into their classrooms for science lessons. The lesson plans are currently under review by several teachers and other educators, with plans to implement these lessons in pilot schools next school year.

The grant was provided by Virginia Association for Environmental Education (VAEE) through a mini-grant program. VAEE is a Virginia-based non-profit organization of environmental education professionals working together to advance sustainability and environmental education throughout Virginia.

VBS has provided mini-grants for nest box cameras to schools for several years. The cameras are mounted to the top of the nest box and connected to the school's technology system. Students can watch live or recorded feeds of bluebirds creating a nest, laying eggs, and raising young from hatching through fledging. Schools can apply for a grant for a nest box camera by visiting <https://virginiabluebirds.org/grant-programs>.

If you would like to review the lesson plans or know of a school that may be interested, please contact Charlene Talcott at vabluebirdscordinator@gmail.com.

What's Happening With New Bluebird Trail Grants

At state-of-the-art Bluestone Elementary School in Harrisonburg, STEM teacher Courtney Sokolowski, with the encouragement of Principal Peter Norment, decided to take commitment to empowering their 'diverse population of students to become stewards of this special place' a step forward. In January, Courtney applied for and received a VBS Bluebird Trail Grant to provide for the installation of six bluebird nest boxes strategically located throughout the 10.8-acre site. Installed on March 2, the boxes proved so successful that Courtney immediately applied for and received a second grant to install two additional boxes.



Above: Valerie Kenyon Gaffney and Ms. Jennifer Kettelkamp training young monitors

Photo by Courtney Sokolowski
Below: the first two Tree Swallow hatchlings at Harrisonburg High School

Photo by Trevor Chase

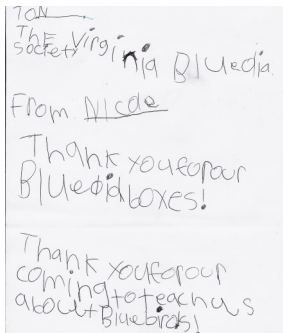


Above: A student (William) and science teacher Trevor Chase pounding a nest box pole at Harrisonburg High School
Photo by Valerie Kenyon Gaffney

Not to be outdone by neighbors across the street, science teacher Trevor Chase at Harrisonburg High School quickly applied for his own grant. On April 19, with assistance from members of the HHS Earth Club, five nest boxes were installed across a wide swath of what will eventually become a native meadow behind the school. In Trevor's own words when applying for the grant, "the goal is to connect our trail to the trail established at Bluestone Elementary School across the street. This will help to establish a partnership between the two schools and hopefully some pathways to mentorship between involved high school students and elementary students."

Should the skies over Harrisonburg be particularly bright blue this summer, some measure of credit will be due to Bluestone Elementary, Harrisonburg High School, and their partnership with VBS.

Are you a teacher looking for ways to connect your students to nature? Check out the various VBS grant programs at <https://www.viriniabluebirds.org>,

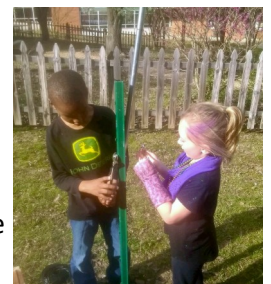


Above: Four of the thank you notes sent to Ms. Gaffney from Ms. Kettelkamp's first graders at Bluestone Elementary in Harrisonburg

What's Happening With School Nest Cam Grants

VBS has been busy installing nest boxes with cameras to give students a firsthand look at what is going on inside the bluebird box through our grant program. Newly added this year, through your dollars going to work for school children:

- A second camera box was installed at AM Davis Elementary School in Chesterfield County. Mrs. Rilee's Nature Buddies received one of our first camera boxes and has remained an active partner with us since April, 2013.
- Patrick Copeland Elementary in Hopewell just installed a camera box in early spring and are on their second brood. Mr. Chilote was able to have the box streaming live on YouTube for all to watch from home or school.
- Harry E James Elementary School in Hopewell just installed a nest box with camera and students are eagerly awaiting their first tenants.



Two of Mrs. Rilee's Nature Buddies helping to install AM Davis Elementary's new box.
Photo by Tony Daniel

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Youth and Scout Grants, continued from page 8

- Pocahontas State Park has live feed from a nest box camera streaming into the camp store for all to watch and learn about our beautiful blues.
- Dupont Elementary in Hopewell has been awarded a grant and will be installing their nest cam box in June. All of the above were installed with the assistance of VBS volunteer and Master Naturalist Tony Daniel.
- Clarksville Elementary in Mecklenburg County installed a nest box, assisted by Daphne and Jerry Cole of VBS. They were greeted at the school with a huge “Welcome Bluebirds” flag flying high. They are ready for their new tenants as well.
- After no birds the first year, and no students the second year, due to COVID-19, the



third year was the charm for Crewe Primary School. Unlike other nest cam boxes installed in April 2019, in Nottoway County, no birds nested at Crewe Primary until the spring of 2020, which yielded three broods. Regrettably, due to COVID-19 school closures, there were no students to observe their new families.

Almost an entire year rolled around before students returned to the classrooms in March, 2021, and discovered a family of bluebirds nesting. Librarian Jennifer Nelson and Technology Specialist Amelia Woodall worked together to make this

experience exceptional in every way. By using additional technology, they were able to live stream to all of the classrooms using Smart Boards. They also established a YouTube link so the nest cam can be observed at home. With the link, families of students in Ethiopia and Panama are watching the nest along with local families.

The family of birds was named by use of polls, and results displayed in a Venn diagram, a Virginia Standards of Learning requirement. The Nottoway School Board Superintendent and staff voted as well. The nest cam is a regular feature on Crewe Primary School’s Facebook page.



*Above : Mrs. Forehand and Jerry Cole installing a nest box at Clarksville Elementary
Photo by Daphne Cole
Left: Bluebird box with nest cam at Crewe Elementary*

What’s Happening With Youth and Scout Grants

In mid-April, Donna Stebner, science teacher and 4-H Club advisor at Liberty Middle School, Clifton, applied for a grant for



installation of twelve bluebird nest boxes. The boxes had been constructed by a volunteer parent and Donna believed adding a bluebird trail to school property would enhance the existing courtyard pollinator garden, bee hives and vegetable garden maintained by her students.

Mike Bishop, Fairfax County Western Sector Bluebird Trail Coordinator, and Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, Virginia Bluebird Society President, met with the students, parents, and Ms. Stebner at the school on May 1. As all of the box locations had been predetermined, Mike and a parent went about installing the equipment. Within ten minutes of putting up the first box, a pair of Tree Swallows flew to the box and began exploring the interior. Talk about instant gratification! Everyone was very excited and many pictures were taken. As they



*Above: Tree Swallow pair checking out the new nest box
Photo by Mike Bishop
Left: Mike Bishop, Donna Stebner, and a parent installing nest boxes at Liberty Middle School, Clifton
Photo by Valerie Kenyon Gaffney*

continued around the property they finished the last installation near an athletic field. As Mike pulled away, he saw another pair of Tree Swallows landing and remaining on top of the box that had been mounted just a few minutes before.

Three teams of students were trained to monitor, and each is responsible for a number of boxes. Since then, Ms. Stebner has reported that there are at least two active Tree Swallow nests. The timing for establishing the trail was perfect since the students have returned to the classrooms at Liberty and the 4H Club is active again.

Spotlight on a County Coordinator: Steve Johnson, Fairfax County

After a good run of five, maybe six years, Steve Johnson recently retired as Fairfax County Coordinator.

When Steve won the Barbara Chambers Coordinator of the Year award in 2017, he was described as bringing “great enthusiasm, energy, time, hard work, wisdom, and humility” to the position. During his tenure, Steve regularly sent out helpful and timely emails, held recruitment and training sessions, found new monitors, and helped with box building and trail maintenance. Not to mention the begging, pleading and begging some more to get trail leads to get their data submitted, if not on time then at the very least before the next nesting season. Overseeing as many as 70 trails some years (second only to Pittsylvania County in number) Steve was indeed “the energizer bunny of County Coordinators.”

After announcing earlier this year he would be stepping down, Steve graciously and actively participated in the many Zoom meetings held to identify and coordinate duties and responsibilities for the committee of five (yes, five!) that are now replacing him. As anyone who is a County Coordinator knows, if you’re doing the job—as Steve did, with unwavering dedication, it’s no easy job. For his years of service as Fairfax County Coordinator, we are enormously grateful. For helping to persuade Mike Bishop, Helaine Krob, Phil Kenny, Carmen Bishop, and Julie Kuttruff to divide the county into somewhat manageable chunks and then step up to fill the void his retirement left, we are also enormously grateful. And finally, for agreeing to stay on as a trail monitor, thanks again. We’re delighted to know you won’t be going far.



Above: Steve Johnson, recently retired Fairfax County Coordinator
Photo by Lynn Johnson

New and Revised Nesting Guides Available on Virginia Bluebird Society Web Site

Compiled by VBS trail lead and volunteer Kelly Gough of Bristow, VA, and vetted in detail by VBS Director Christine Boran, these forms will fulfill a need many of us have faced when a native bird other than an Eastern Bluebird moves in. Not sure of incubation period? Wondering how soon the nestlings will fledge? These will prove invaluable for Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse landlords.

Access these Nesting Guides at www.virginiabluebirds.org/forms.

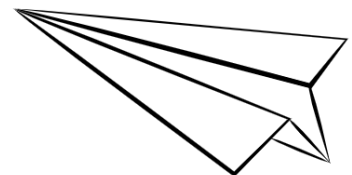
You are invited ...



to join the North American Bluebird Society! Our Virginia Bluebird Society is an affiliate of NABS which is also a 501c3 non-profit who shares our mission of conservation of native cavity nesting birds. Your support of NABS with a membership provides annual grants in education, conservation and research. NABS provides a telephone hotline for real time help with nest box problems. NABS provides four issues of Bluebird, a color journal, and fact sheets with information on how to become a successful bluebirder. Please support NABS today. More information is available at www.nabluebirdsociety.org

Digital Newsletter: Let Us Know What You Think

Virginia Bluebird Society is evaluating an all-digital newsletter, in consideration of budget, sustainability, and environmental responsibility. We currently send out around 125 paper copies; if you are one of the recipients, we want to know how soon you are willing to switch to an emailed digital copy. Please send us your thoughts at vbs@virginiabluebirds.org.





Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Our email address is:

vbs@virginiabluebirds.org

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



Abandoned Nests

Q: I have a bluebird that had eggs that never hatched. When is it considered abandoned, and should I remove the unhatched eggs and nest? Sometimes a nest is built but eggs never laid. Should I remove that nest, and if so, when?

A: We remove USED, SOILED nests after a fledging for various reasons:

- 1) It prevents the new nesting materials from building up too high over an old one, which can put the nestlings too close to the entry hole.
- 2) There can be parasites inside the used nest (i.e. blowfly larvae, mites, lice), unremoved fecal sacs, and uneaten dead bugs remaining after the fledging process.

We want the bluebirds to build a fresh nest for the next brood. However, a nest that didn't successfully hatch eggs and rear young is a different situation. That nest is not soiled; there is no need to remove it. Regarding the eggs that never hatched, if you wait three weeks, and the eggs still haven't hatched, wait one more week (total 30 days) and see if the parent bird returns to lay more eggs. Many times the female will remove the unviable eggs herself and will start over and lay more eggs on the nest she already built. If that does not happen, go ahead and remove the unhatched eggs with a plastic spoon and throw them out to nature far away from the nest box. Leave the unused nest in place and see what happens.

If the female goes missing after a nest is built, another female bluebird or another native bird species may use it by incorporating their own materials within the clean nest already there. A Tree Swallow will add some feathers on top, or a Chickadee may add mosses, hairs, and fibers to the mix. This saves them time and energy. You might even see a nuthatch or titmouse move in.

If you have broken eggs that leaked fluid, such as from an attack on the nest and eggs, and the nest is then abandoned because of the incident, that's a time to remove that nest in its entirety. Those egg fluids can decompose inside the nest material, which can smell bad and attract mammal predators, ants, or flies to the nest box. Birds that have one brood per season, such as Chickadees and Tree Swallows, take much longer to build a nest and lay eggs, so allow them plenty of time to do so.

If you have an abandoned nest still clean late in the season, here is a tip! First, check for any possible insect invasion, such as ants or wasps. If all clear, take half of it out and let the bottom half remain as bedding for a roosting bird taking shelter from cold winds and winter storms. Don't forget to plug the ventilation at the top by the ceiling - you've just winterized your nest box!

Do you have a question for the next newsletter's Bluebird Advisor? Send it to:

woolwinehouse@gmail.com



Above: An abandoned Carolina Chickadee nest taken over by a Tree Swallow.

Photo by Christine Boran

Mark Your Calendars

- June and July** Continue monitoring nest boxes; check for parasites such as wasps, blowflies, and ants.
- July 17, 10:00 am** Quarterly VBS board meeting via Zoom. Check your email for further details, or contact vbs@virginiabluebirds.org for link to attend meeting.
- August 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for fall newsletter.
- September** Collect trail data and send to county coordinator and State Coordinator Charlene Talcott at vabluebirdscoordinator@gmail.com.
- November 13, 10:00 am** Annual VBS Board Meeting via Zoom. Check your email in mid-October for further details, or contact vbs@virginiabluebirds.org for link to attend meeting.
- November 12-13, 2022** Save the date! VBS Conference Twenty-five Plus One
- 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.

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. 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 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.



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