

VBS County Coordinator Possible Activities

Introduction:

This paper describes some activities for VBS county coordinators. **It should be considered as a set of suggestions** (rather than a set of duties) about what the County Coordinators can do to help further the goals of the Society, which are to promote the welfare of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting bird species, in their geographic areas. VBS is prepared to provide a variety of support to the individual County Coordinators, including training materials, slide shows, or a power point program and its CD, workshops on establishing and monitoring trails and data collection. VBS can also give grants to local boy scouts or other young people to provide support for projects about the bluebirds (including for example, bluebird box-building projects; see below). There is also an new grant for new or refurbished trails on public lands. The applications and requirements can be found, for both, on the VBS web page: www.virginiabluebirds.org. In addition VBS will participate in local or county fairs in your areas, as well as provide direct grants for the purchase of boxes (or materials to build boxes) and monitoring supplies, for the establishment of new trails on public lands. VBS policy remains that we cannot help financially for boxes or trails on Private land. The County Coordinators can also recruit people to undertake some of the individual tasks described below; for example, working with a local Boy Scout troop.

County coordinator Activities include:

Recruiting people to help monitor existing bluebird trails, to manage existing trails (as trail leaders), to establish new trails, to help raise funds to buy or build bluebird boxes for new trails or to upgrade existing trails; and to help with the maintenance of existing trails, including repairing or replacing damaged bluebird boxes, predator guards, and mountings, winterizing boxes on trails for winter use of roosting bluebirds.

Recruiting local boy scouts or Boy Scout troops to undertake projects to build a set of bluebird boxes for a local trail. This process involves making contact with the local troop to provide information on such projects, talking with individual scout-volunteers about what's involved, including fund raising, planning, arranging for participation in the project by other scouts, and production of a prototype for inspection by the coordinator. The coordinator also provides construction plans for boxes, [all available in the web site: www.virginiabluebirds.org] predator guards and mountings; and finally, signs off on required scout troop paperwork.

Training people in the process of establishing bluebird trails, including habitat requirements, box construction, the importance and use of predator guards, bluebird box orientation and spacing on a trail, box pairing, winterizing, etc. Training people in monitoring bluebird trails, including the need for weekly monitoring, developing an understanding of the bluebird nesting cycle, determining the age of chicks and predicting hatching and fledging times (bluebird math); and in the routine collection of data on numbers of eggs, hatched birds, and fledglings. VBS has the appropriate forms on their web site, see Data Collection below.

Sponsoring or encouraging local awareness of VBS activities through newspaper articles radio announcements, attendance at local or county fairs, and the giving of programs when requested.

Data Collection:

VBS has developed data forms that are designed to collect basic data concerning the numbers of birds that fledge from bluebird boxes monitored. The purposes of the data collection are two-fold: first to allow us to monitor the health of our trails, so we can assess the need for improvements, for example in box placement, or the need for increased predator protection; and second, to learn about our progress in boosting local and state-wide cavity-nesting bird populations.

Forms and instructions for their use are accessible on the VBS web site (www.virginiabluebirds.org). These forms are in PDF format, and can easily be printed out for use by trail monitors. But please, with respect to data collection, always keep in mind the following quote from the instructions for data collection:

Our mission is to help the bluebirds prosper. The data, while nice to have, is secondary to the primary mission.

The basic data is collected using a single Weekly Nest-Box Monitors form. This form is pictured on our web page. The remaining forms serve the purpose of first, recording (once a season) the characteristics of the individual trails, including the

types and styles of boxes used, types of mounting, predator protection, and habitat; and second, summarizing the data from the Monitors forms for use by the local trail monitors, trail leaders, and county coordinators, and for use in generating a state-wide data base containing data for each nesting season.

The County Coordinators responsibility with respect to Data Collection Forms:

Providing data forms to the individual trail leaders or monitors; providing training/instruction in the use of the forms. (often a useful technique is to accompany individual monitors or groups of monitors on a monitoring cycle of a trail). Occasionally monitoring the forms being collected by individual trail leaders or monitors in order to correct any errors the monitors may be making routinely. Routinely remind individual monitors about the need to do weekly monitoring, and about getting their data in to the coordinator at the end of the season.

One important annual job of the County coordinator is to be sure that all of the trail leaders and monitors, get their annual summary forms to the County Coordinator so that the data can be forwarded to the **state compiler** for entering in the state-wide data base. The compiler has a target of finishing combining and summarizing the statewide data so that the overall results can be published in the early spring newsletter. Entering the data takes about a month; so the compiler needs the data by the first of September each year as there are now so many trails and counties reporting. Thank you!