The North Carolina Bluebird Society
135 Lakeview Drive
Tarboro, NC 27886

Address Service Requested

Bluebird Tips

Prior to the 1930's, the Eastern Bluebird was one of North Carolina's most common songbirds. By 1979, bluebirds were declared rare and uncommon by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Man's activities and severe winters resulted in a 90% decline in our bluebird population. The continuing loss of natural nesting sites and other problems faced by bluebirds indicate that this beloved bird will always need man's help to survive.

REASONS FOR DECLINE

- DDT chemicals killed the insects bluebirds fed on and even killed the birds themselves.
- Nesting sites were lost when wooden fence posts were replaced with metal posts, and dead trees and limbs were cut for firewood.
- Many small farms were combined into large operations with huge fields that destroyed the mixed habitat needed by bluebirds.
- Cities spread into rural areas further reducing preferred habitat.
- Heavy snow or ice covered their food.
- Winter food supply (berries) was reduced by civilization's spread.
- The introduction of the European Starling and House (English) Sparrow upset the balance of nature forever. These nonnative birds are so adaptable and aggressive that they spread across the continent, taking nesting sites and even killing our native birds and destroying their eggs.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Install nest boxes with a 1 1/2" entry hole.
- Monitor your nest boxes weekly, removing only starling and house sparrow nests.
- Plant berry producing plants or shrubs.
- Supply fresh, clean water all year.
- Erect a bluebird feeder with dogwood berries, raisins, currants, and mealworms.
- Join the North Carolina Bluebird Society, and become an active member or county coordinator.

APPROXIMATE NESTING SCHEDULE FOR NORTH CAROLINA

Mid February: Bluebirds select nesting territory
April: Begin nest building, egg laying, and incubation
April 15—May 15: First brood of eggs hatch
June 1—July 25: Second brood of eggs hatch
August 1—August 15: Third brood of eggs hatch

NATURAL HISTORY

The brilliant blue male bluebird, has a rusty throat, breast and sides and white belly. He sits high atop a dead tree or branch, TV antenna, or power line to hunt for the insects that make up two-thirds of his diet. He and his mate also eat wild berries, especially in cold weather when insects are not available. They rarely damage cultivated crops, and are very beneficial to farmers and gardeners by eating insects. The young bluebirds have spotted breasts until fall molt, when all bluebirds grow dull feathers for protection from predators.

As early as the end of February and as late as June, the male bluebird locates a nesting site, establishes a territory around it of two to five acres, and sings to attract a female and warn other male bluebirds to stay away. Once a female accepts the site, she builds a neat cup shaped nest of dry grasses and pine needles. Nest building may take five days to three weeks.

The female lays one blue, or rarely white, egg each morning until three to six eggs are produced. The female begins incubating the eggs after the final egg is produced. Thirteen to fourteen days later, all eggs will hatch within hours of one another.

The adults begin feeding the young immediately after hatching, starting with soft insects and graduating to courser foods as the nestlings grow. The adults also keep the nest clean by removing the fecal sacs which enclose the nestlings' waste. The nestlings grow very rapidly, with their eyes opening on about the eighth day. By the time the nestlings fledge (leave) the nest box on the seventeenth or eighteenth day after hatching, they will be the size of an adult bluebird.

Usually the entire brood of fledglings leaves the box within two hours. The fledglings can fly fifty to one hundred feet on their first flight and try to land in a bush, shrub or low branch to avoid predators. The adults continue to care for the young and teach them to forage for food. The male bluebird will continue this job while the female begins her second or third nest. On occasion, the young from a first nesting will help feed the nestlings from their parents' second or third nesting.

After nesting season is over, bluebirds give up their territories and flock together. North Carolina bluebirds do not migrate. They are joined by migrant northern bluebirds and roam the area looking for berries. In winter, bluebirds will roost in pine tree stands and nest boxes to avoid cold weather.

NEST BOX PLACEMENT

Location of a bluebird nest box is important. Select an open area with scattered trees and sparse ground cover. Avoid underbrush, tall grass, dense woods, farm buildings, and areas where pesticides are used. Good locations are frequently mowed lawns, fields, meadows, orchards, and road sides.

The nest box should be placed on a pole (not a tree) about five feet high, with a squirrel and raccoon baffle below the nest box. Face the nest box toward a shrub or tree with low branches for the fledglings to land on their maiden flight. It is best to face the entrance hole east to south.

While there is no bad time to erect a bluebird nest box, it is best to have them in place by mid-February when bluebirds begin to select their nesting territory.

NEST BOX MAINTENANCE

- In late winter, inspect your boxes and make any needed repairs. Make sure the box is in good condition and mounted securely.
- Make sure the entrance hole is 1 1/2" in diameter. If it is larger than 1 1/2", replace the box or repair the opening.
- Clean out any old nests that might remain.
- Check for and remove any wasp nests, and rub bar soap on the underside of the roof to avoid future wasp nests.
- Move the nest box to a new location if there was no activity through the entire nesting cycle or if predators were a problem in the previous season.

MONITORING

Many people are hesitant to look inside of their nest boxes, but monitoring your boxes gives bluebirds a much greater chance of survival. Monitoring leads to early detection of problems and provides valuable research data.

1. Monitor nest boxes at least once a week during spring and summer.
2. Make a noise as you approach the box and tap on its side before opening. The adult will likely leave the nest and the young will huddle down. If the female stays in the nest box, close the box and return later. If she is in the process of laying an egg, she cannot leave.
3. Stand to the side of the box, away from the entrance hole and open the box very slowly and carefully. Be prepared for animals other than birds.
4. Record the number of eggs or nestlings and the date.
5. Do NOT open front or side opening nest boxes once the nestlings are fourteen days old as this could cause premature fledging.
6. Remove old nests from the box once the young have fledged. Remove house sparrow and starling nests and eggs immediately. Do NOT remove the nest of other cavity (nest box) nesting birds.

CAVITY NESTING BIRDS WHICH USE NEST BOXES WITH 1 1/2" HOLE

Species	Nest Material	Egg Color
Bluebird	Pine needles, dried grasses	Blue
Chickadee	Moss, wood chips, hair, feathers, fur	White with brown specks
House Finch	Twigs, dried grasses	Pale bluish
Nuthatch	Wood chips, bark, roots, dried grasses	White with brown specks
Titmouse	Dried grasses, dried leaves, feathers	White with brown specks
Tree Swallow	Dried grasses, feathers	Pure white
Wren	Twigs topped with with dried grasses	White with brown specks
*House Sparrow	Loosely woven dried grasses, trash (cigarette butts, paper, etc.)	White with brown specks

* Remove and destroy nests and eggs of this species ONLY. It is a federal offense to tamper with the nest or eggs of any other species on this list. If you are in doubt, watch for the adult bird to enter the box and identify the adult bird.

The NORTH CAROLINA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY, INC. is a NC organization dedicated to ensuring the future of the Eastern Bluebird and other cavity-nesting birds native to North Carolina.

The Society will work toward its goals by:

- Promoting bluebird projects among its members and other interested groups in the state.
- Conducting educational programs and workshops
- Distributing educational materials
- Collecting and sharing nesting data
- Encouraging and aiding the development of nest box trails.
- Undertaking any other endeavors that will aid our native cavity-nesting birds.

The web-site address, **www.ncbluebird.org. Here you will find** basic bluebird information. These Bluebird Tips can be printed out from that web-site.

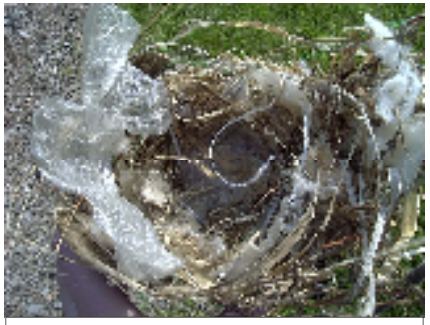
Many NC counties have County Coordinators. One of them may be close enough to you to answer bluebird questions or to do bluebird talks.

Questions?? Call Ray Welch (336) 764-0226
Helen Munro (910) 673-6936
Bill Abbey (336) 766-5857
Christine Ammons (828) 287-3502

Won't you join the North Carolina Bluebird Society and help make North Carolina leading state in bluebird conservation?

Ideal setting for bluebird nest box

Bluebird nest and eggs
Pine needles and dried grasses.
Eggs are typically blue in color.



English Sparrow nest
Loosely woven grasses,
plastic and trash.
Eggs are white
with brown specks.

North Carolina Bluebird Society

Membership Application

Our primary goal is to increase the bluebird (and other cavity nester) population in every county in North Carolina. You can help.

NCBS memberships are for one or three years. You will receive a copy of *Bluebirds For Ever,* a pamphlet detailing nest box monitoring, and four newsletters, "Bluebird Notes" each year. The newsletter articles will keep you informed regarding bluebird activities in North Carolina as well as nationally.

Dues are $10.00 per year or
$25.00 for three years.

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____

Zip Code:_____

County:_____

Phone Number:_____

Make your check payable to : **NCBS**

Mail this form and your check to:
David Hindsley
135 Lakeview Dr.
Tarboro, NC 27886

Is this a renewal membership?_____

Is this a new membership?_____

Check amount: $_____

Please indicate if you also have an interest in:

_____Establishing a bluebird trail in your area
_____Contacting your local paper with news
_____Volunteering to be a County Coordinator
_____Helping with the newsletter
_____Conducting a bluebird workshop
_____Serving as a NCBS Board Member
_____Assisting with the annual meeting
_____Other: Please explain:_____
_____
_____