

# The Bird Box

Summer 2012 Newsletter of the  
Virginia Bluebird Society [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)



## Nestcam Grants Available to Public Schools

VBS was awarded a grant from a private family foundation to promote bluebird conservation in schools, particularly through the use of nest box cameras. VBS has completed some preliminary research on nestcams and the many ways they can be implemented, and even conducted two pilot programs as described in Vickie's article on page 4. At the school in Danville, the excitement over the first bluebird egg captured by the nestcam touched everyone from the School Board to the kindergarteners. VBS would like to extend this excitement to other schools by passing on the grant money we received to schools that would like to install nestcams.

**Who is eligible?** The grant money is available for public schools in Virginia. The person applying on behalf of the school could be a teacher, staff or parent, but school approval should be secured prior to applying to VBS.

**What does the grant cover?** The grant can be used for the cost of materials (nest box, predator guards, camera, etc.).

There are two options. One is to use the Hawk Eye Nature Cam that VBS has tested. With this, VBS will be able to provide the camera and a nest box specially designed with a false roof to accommodate the camera, while supplies last. The other option would be for a school to propose an alternative nestcam.

**How to apply:** Apply by mail or email with a letter describing your interest in a nestcam for your school. The nest box will need to have predator guards and be monitored according to VBS protocols during the nesting season. Tell us where the box will be located, how the students will be able to view the video, who the lead will be for the project, and how the nestcam fits into other conservation efforts at the school. Please include a phone number. Submit your application to: Vickie Fuquay at [vickiefuquay@comcast.net](mailto:vickiefuquay@comcast.net) or 222 Oakmont Trail, Danville, VA 24541.



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Please share this information with your local schools!

Carmen Bishop

Photo by Vickie Fuquay

## First Eggs in Virginia in 2012

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

Our *e-mail address* is:  
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*We welcome your written items and artwork (photos and drawings) for The Bird Box!*

E-mail your materials to Doug Rogers.

Last year we requested information from our monitors on when the first eggs appeared; 24 monitors responded last year; this year 23 responded. (See chart below) The first entry in February was for three eggs, which were found broken. Interesting that the birds were active this early.

Our first viable egg this year came from Chesterfield Co. in Varina. The five eventual eggs in that brood all hatched on March 23 - a countable record. It is interesting too that Bluebirds were the first active birds, just like last year.

The Bluebirds will watch the previous year's nest box all winter and early spring, and then claim it again by putting in early straw and staying close by to protect "their" spot again this year. When they do this, they win out over the House Wrens, Chickadees, and all others!

## Virginia's First Eggs For 2012

Date	Species	County	Monitor
11 - Feb	E. Bluebird	Botetourt	T. Evans
4 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Chesterfield	J. Kacmarcik
8 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Patrick	C. Boran
10 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Pittsylvania	V. Fuquay
17 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Fluvana	F. Tyler
18 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Prince Wm.	C. Hindman
18 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Louisa	F. Tyler
18 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Pulaski	C. Hansen
18 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Roanoke	E. Morris
20 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Rappahannock	B. Patterson
20 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Fairfax	R. Frost
21 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Fairfax	E. Clark
21 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Fairfax	L. Martin
21 - Mar	E. Bluebird	Buchanan	R. Mayhorn
22 - Mar	E. Bluebird	York	L. Ullman
24 - Mar	Carolina Chickadee	Chesterfield	J. Kacmarcik
27 - Mar	Carolina Chickadee	Roanoke	E. Morris
1 - Apr	Tufted Titmouse	Chesterfield	J. Kacmarcik
1 - Apr	Carolina Chickadee	Arlington	A.D. Holland
1 - Apr	Tree Swallow	Roanoke	E. Morris
4 - Apr	E. Bluebird	Fairfax	N. Shipman
22 - Apr	E. Bluebird	Fairfax	T. Pasec
27 - Apr	House Wren	Roanoke	E. Morris

## Predator Attack and Victory Celebration

My wife and I enjoy observing Bluebird behavior at the nest box in our backyard.

One morning I was surprised when suddenly a Starling appeared at the nest box. (Photo top-left) I had my camera with me and decided to take pictures of the Starling invading the Bluebirds' nest box.



The Bluebirds knocked the Starling off the nest box, (Photo top right, below) and a fight on the ground ensued. The Starling then attacked the nest box again.



At the beginning of the third attack, I decided to get involved and chased the Starling off.

As I started to go down to download the photos, the Bluebirds began a "happy dance" which I believe was a wing waving celebration. I had read of this behavior but never before witnessed it. The Bluebirds waved both wings, waved one wing, stomped their feet and made short flights around the nest box. The celebration lasted longer than the attack. (See bottom right photo)

Then calm returned to our Bluebirds' nest box.

The Starling did not return.

When the attack occurred the eggs had probably not yet hatched because about a month later I photographed a fledgling leaving the nest box for its first flight.

Bill Fox,

foxfinephotography, LLC

(804) 338 8989

All Photos by Bill Fox



## Bluebird Conservation: The Legacy Continues

Who will carry on our bluebird conservation effort when we are no longer able to monitor the boxes? How many of us remember a school trip to a museum or zoo that sparked a lifelong love of birds, wildlife, art or even gardening. Personally, I had a grandpa who fed birds and squirrels peanuts from his pocket and an aunt who kept a bird journal and could name every bird that visited her feeder. I also had the misfortune of hitting a bird (Eastern Bluebird) I had never seen before. These experiences turned me into the Bluebird lady I am today. After a little research back in the mid 80's to find out why I had never seen a bluebird, it did not take me long to get my first bluebird house up. But what about the next generation coming up? Will they share our interest in the Bluebird comeback that we have seen for the last 20 – 25 years?

The Virginia Bluebird Society has come up with the perfect solution! I have always said a picture is worth a thousand

words. We have placed bluebird boxes on school campuses for years but we now have equipped 2 boxes with cameras in a pilot program

to spark the interest of boys and girls as they are able to watch what goes on inside the nest box.



Grove Park Magnet School here in Danville VA was one school chosen to be a pilot because they had an active Bluebird trail in place at the school. Late this winter we replaced an existing Bluebird box with the new box fitted with a Hawk Eye Nature Cam. The camera is a color video cam, with infrared night vision and a built in microphone. The 100 foot cable simply plugs into any television or AV enabled computer for live real time audio and video action. At Grove Park, the simplest solution to enable the whole school to take advantage of the camera box was to run the cable in

through the window of the library and hook into the large screen TV located there. As each class rotates through for time in the library they are able to watch the birds building their nest on the large TV.

The second camera box is at Yorktown Elementary School in York County, located in a small garden outside the science resource classroom. This is an ideal location as every class in the school spends a period in this resource class every week. The nest-cam is being integrated into a larger effort by the school to improve wildlife habitat on the school grounds. Once birds settle into the box – key events will be captured on video tape for the rest of the school to appreciate. As the math and science magnet school for the district, this camera adds a significant classroom resource.

By recording the action over a period of time the schools could put together a DVD or video of the bluebirds building nests, laying eggs, hatching babies and feeding young to be passed around to each class. This would enable everyone to see the whole process rather than just what is going on at the time they are able watch the live feed on the TV.

Thanks to the partnership between the Virginia Bluebird Society and area schools, the love for our Eastern Bluebird is being carried to the next generation of conservationists.

Vickie Fuquay



Photos by Vickie Fuquay

# Bluebird Perils

My wife, Lynda, and I monitor 70+ Bluebird nest boxes each breeding season, some of which are in our yard.

This year we placed a small video cam in one of the boxes so we could watch what went on inside the box. In late March we watched a pair of Eastern Bluebirds build their nest. It was good fun.

Within a few days after the nest was complete, she began to lay.

By April 7th she had laid five eggs. We watched to see if she would start sitting (brooding) within the next couple of days, however this didn't happen. She would sit on the eggs at night, but during the day she would be on the eggs for 10 minutes then off for 30. This went on day after day, even on mornings when the temperature was down into the 40's. I didn't think the eggs would hatch; but on the 14th day four of the five eggs did hatch.

The next day the weather remained wet and the temperature continued to fall. The parents brought less and less food. The female would only sit on the young for a few minutes at a time.

I noticed that the young ones had become sluggish and only occasionally raised their heads to beg for food. I saw that they would not make it without some help. I got out my long extension cord and work light with a 60 watt black light bulb in. (The black light would not be bright at night so as not to disturb the birds.)

Within an hour the heat from the bulb warmed the box to 85°F. After that the nestlings became more active. I went out and

fed each one some small mealworms to help them make it through the night. The outside temperature dropped to near 34° by morning; the temperature inside the box was approximately 70. Meanwhile, as dusk fell, the mother bird returned to the nest and sat on the young all through the cold, wet night. The next morning the young looked healthy and were actively begging. The day began to warm, and the parent birds got busy bringing food to them. After the outside temperature rose high enough I removed the heat lamp.

Following this event, the little ones grew fatter, and more vocal as the days went by. We watched as the parents brought huge grubs and other insects that looked impossibly large for the young to swallow, but they did it with ease. Between the 12th and 13th day we watched as the white eye-ring became evident on each one. Their wing feathers became longer. They grew tiny tail feathers only a fraction of the length they would be when they became adults.

On May 10 they had grown so large they couldn't sit in the nest, but perched on its edge. The next morning around 7:30 we checked the monitor, and they were gone. They must have gone shortly after dawn. We saw the parents taking insects to the lilac bush or some other shrub or tree in the yard where a fledgling was hidden. We wished them safe flights, and hoped that they might return to nest in one of our nest boxes next year.

Roger Mayhorn  
Compton Mt

All Photos by Roger Mayhorn



# Source for Large Meal Worms

Bassett's Cricket Ranch currently has a special discount for NABS members. They have a plentiful supply of mealworms to help you and your members out through these trying times. The company currently ships throughout the United States & Canada via Fedex and USPS. Just mention that you are a NABS member to receive their special pricing.

Bassett's Cricket Ranch  
365 S. Mariposa  
Visalia, CA 93292  
(559) 747-2738



## **Correction:**

Inadvertently, I left the Floyd County data out of the statewide bluebird trail summary that accompanied the spring Birdbox. My apologies to the County Coordinator Christine Boran and the trail leaders Jean Schaeffer and Karen Hale. Here are their results as they should have appeared in the summary (and will appear with the summary on the web site this spring): 2 trails, 5 boxes; 5 bluebird nest attempts, 24 eggs; 23 hatched, and 23 fledged. Also 2 tree swallow nest attempts; 9 eggs, 5 hatched, and 5 fledged.

Charlie Chambers

## **NABS Conference in Southern California**

The Southern California Bluebird Club invites you to the 35<sup>th</sup> annual conference, October 5-7, 2012. Our theme is, "*A Better World for Bluebirds is a Better World for All,*" or, how saving one native species safeguards a whole ecosystem. Our keynote speaker will be Laura Erickson, science contributor for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. We have planned field trips and workshops on cavity nesters, owls, woodpeckers, western and mountain Bluebirds, all with the emphasis on conservation. You will be invited on field trips and will learn how our club fledged over 7,500 bluebirds in the spring of 2010 and 7,777 in 2011. Check us out and get complete conference and hotel registration information at

[www.socalbluebirds.org](http://www.socalbluebirds.org). Also see us on Youtube at [http://youtu.be/CS2\\_jMQwqd0](http://youtu.be/CS2_jMQwqd0).

## **New VDGIF Permit Fees!**

VDGIF is now requiring people to obtain daily or annual permits in order to visit state wildlife management areas - even to walk, photograph or view nature. If you weren't aware and regularly visit places like G. Richard Thompson WMA for the wildflower spectacle in the spring, you need a \$4.00 daily permit or an annual permit (\$23.00) to do so. Budgets are tight and getting tighter - passive use permits are being used more and more to help defray costs of state management programs that hunters and other sportsmen having been supporting for years....Check their website for more information: <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/access-permit>

## Calendar

### Bluebird presentation for Westchester Garden Club:

September 25, Roanoke; contact Earl Morris at [emorris@ntelos.net](mailto:emorris@ntelos.net)

### State Fair:

September 28 – October 7, Doswell; VOLUNTEERS needed – please call Beth Elkins at 540-775-2464 & leave a message to sign up for shifts (10am – 3pm or 3pm – 8pm)

### NABS 35th Annual Conference:

October 4 – 6, Newport Beach California; [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)

### Eastern Shore Birding & Wildlife Festival:

October 7 – 9, Cape Charles



Photo by Doug Rogers

### VBS Board Meeting:

November 3, 10:30am, Nellysford; members welcome, RSVP to Carmen at [cjbish@aol.com](mailto:cjbish@aol.com)

### Dear Answer Lady,

I just read the latest newsletter from the New York State Bluebird Society and saw the following:

"It is illegal to disturb an active nest of any bird except house sparrows and starlings. We can remove the twigs and spider web cocoons of the house wren, but once it lays eggs, we have to leave it alone, that's the law."

This would seem to say that it is OK to keep removing House Wren twigs as long as you do it before any eggs are laid. Is that what you think? I'll be interested in your view.

### Dear Member,

This has always been a difficult "call" for all us monitors. NYSBS is right. And that is what VBS tells its members too. However, sometimes it takes a bit of common sense to know when it is OK and

when you should not remove the sticks.

House wrens [HOWR] are migratory and do not return from Mexico until about May 1.

The male arrives first and has to find a cavity and a mate. He goes around and fills cavities in all the boxes in what he perceives as "His" territory and then invites the female to choose.

Once that choice is made and she **builds a nest among the sticks**, THEN you can go back and remove the twigs and sticks from the other boxes. But the HOWR is a native bird and you must allow it to nest. However, a box of sticks is not a nest. The nest is a very small cup affair, made of fine rootlets.

As long as you have one resident nesting HOWR on your trail you can continue to remove all sticks from all boxes from then on.

**The Answer Lady**

### Pocohontas State Park Nest Boxes Renewed

In 2011, Pocohontas State Park replaced its old decrepit and unprotected boxes with 23 new boxes mounted with predator and Noel guards. Last year there were 61 birds fledged --- a five fold increase from the previous year. This year we are off to an amazing start with as many fledged by the middle of May as

all of last year. So far we have solely bluebirds and Carolina chickadees nesting in these boxes. We are fortunate to have very dedicated volunteers monitoring two trails. Many of these volunteers are members of the PSP chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist program.

Lee and Jane Hesler

## How to Join

Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check for \$10 for an individual or \$15 for a family to:

Virginia Bluebird Society  
726 William Street  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Membership forms are available on the VBS website:

[www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)

## New Logo

A BIG thank you goes to Pam McMillie and Stephen Wolfsberger for giving VBS a beautiful new color logo. Pam proposed that we join the ranks of other state Bluebird societies with a color logo and suggested a unique design featuring a Bluebird flying across the state of Virginia. Stephen, with his expertise as a retired graphic designer, produced the final look.

Carmen Bishop



Virginia Bluebird Society  
726 William Street  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

## Suppliers on the Web

If you aren't up to building a nest box or bluebird feeder, you can now download a list of suppliers from the VBS website, currently under the Nest Boxes, Guards & Signs tab.