

Nest Box Monitoring

1. Take note of adult birds in area of box, Bluebirds as well as problem causing birds.
2. Keep accurate records of monitored boxes.
3. Try to know the date the last egg was laid so you can more accurately estimate when incubation begins as well as the age of the nestlings.
4. Monitor during calm, mild or dry days to prevent chicks from being chilled.

Opening the box:

1. Stand away from the entrance of box.
2. Lightly tap on the side of box to alert adults that maybe inside.
3. Open box and note:
 - Type of nest - - - complete or partial
 - Number of eggs and color, Warm or cool?
 - Or number of nestlings and approximate age of nestlings
 - Predation that might have occurred (snake, raccoon, squirrel, sparrow or wren)
 - Infestations . . . wasps, bees, ants, blowfly larva
4. Record this information for bluebirds as well as other cavity dwellers using the box.
5. Make sure the box is securely closed.

After bluebirds have fledged:

1. Open box and check for any unhatched eggs . . . Note this in your records
2. Check for dead babies or adults. Try to account for all eggs that were in the box to get an accurate fledgling count.
3. Remove old nest and clean box. If blowflies or larva are found spray with a weak solution of pyrethrin (1%) and leave box open for 24-48 hours.

Type of nest and cavity dwelling birds that use bluebird boxes:

1. Bluebird - - - neat cup of pine needles or dry grass - Eggs are blue and rarely white
2. Chickadee - - - Neat cup of green moss lined with animal hair - Eggs are buff colored and speckled with reddish brown, more heavily on the larger end.
3. Tufted titmouse - - - Sloppy gathering of moss with leaves, animal hair, and sometimes a snake skin - Eggs are white with fine speckles of purplish red
4. House Wren - - - nests are made of sticks that fill the box with a grassy cup down at the back of the box. – Eggs are white with heavy brown spots
5. Tree Swallows - - - Very neat cup of fine grasses lined with feathers – Eggs are white
6. House Sparrows - - - Very Sloppy and trashy. Made of grass, trash, straw and leaves, usually almost filling the box running up the back side of the box – Eggs are white with brown spots.

Average Timetable for Bluebirds at Each Nesting Stage

Nest building: 1-6 days

Egg Laying: 5-7 days

Incubation: 12-14 days

Brooding: 6 days

Fledging: 16- 21 days

Nesting Schedule

Day 1: Bright coral-pink skin, eyes sealed, down in sparse tufts.

Day 2-4: Wings, head, spine look bluish due to developing feathers under the skin.

Day 5-6: Feather sheaths begin to emerge on wings. Eyes still closed.

Day 7: First feathers burst from tip of sheaths. Eyes open as slits. Brooding by female stops.

Day 8-11: Eyes fully open. Feathers continue to burst sheaths.

Day 11-12: Feathers of wing and tail reveal cobalt blue in males, females duller gray-blue in females.

Females show white edging on outer tail feathers.

Day 13: Cut-off date for box checks. Fully feathered young become increasingly active, and may fledge prematurely if box is opened.

Day 14-22: Fledging and first flight. Empty nest soiled and flattened. Young remain in cover while parents bring food.

Day 28 & on: Fledglings fly strong, following parents who feed them.

Day 30 on: Fledglings feed unassisted.

For additional information, contact:

Vickie Fuquay

434-822-0930

vickiefuquay@comcast.net