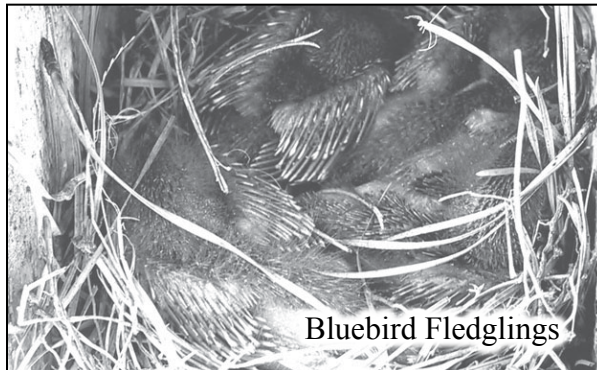


Bluebird Trail monitoring

Bluebird trails consist of a series of nestboxes set up at least 300 feet apart. A trail can have just a few boxes or many. These adaptable birds nest in cavities 15 feet in the air or higher. Since monitoring a box that high would be difficult, mount the box 4-5 feet off the ground. If you plan to build and monitor a bluebird trail you can use the following information to help ensure success.

MONITORING

A bluebird trail monitor must commit to checking bluebird boxes often. Many factors hinder bluebirds from successfully breeding in an area including: bad weather, predation, disease, and insect infestation. These special boxes open without stressing the birds. Check each box once a week, and no more. Keep an accurate record of what is found. With dedication, a bluebird monitor will establish a trail with many fledglings.



LOCATION

Place the boxes in areas suitable for bluebirds. Bluebirds prefer to nest near fields with low vegetation like a mowed lawn. Here the birds feed by landing on a perch and searching for crawling insects. If there are many large shrubs and high grasses, the bird will have trouble spotting a worthy meal. Position the nest boxes within 10-25 feet of scattered trees, a hedgerow, or forest edge.

PERCHES

Bluebirds like dead tree limbs as perches. If none are nearby the nest box, make one with wooden

slats with a crossbar nailed to the top. A birdbath may also attract bluebirds. Here bluebirds bathe towards the end of the day, and then carefully preen themselves before returning to the nest box at night. Keep the birdbath clean and situate it in an open area so the birds can watch for predators.

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PROTECTION

Mount the box to provide predator protection. Use wooden posts, U shaped posts (like those used for road signs), and metal pipes to mount bluebird boxes. Boxes can be mounted on trees and fence posts, but these methods are discouraged because it provides easy access for predators. Use predator guards with any type of mounting device.

PREDATORS

Raccoons, cats, snakes, and birds of prey such as hawks feed on bluebirds. Install nest boxes away from known hawk nesting sites. Set up predator baffles to keep the ground dwelling predators away. Insects such as wasps and ants may use bluebird boxes to build nests. They can harm the bluebirds, so remove them if found. Blowflies lay their eggs in bluebird nests. The parasitic larvae feed on the blood of young bluebirds. To examine for blowflies when checking the box, gently pick up the nest and shake or tap it softly. If infested, larvae will fall from the nest. Simply brush them out and replace the nest. If heavily infested, remove the nest and build a new nest out of similar materials.

Source: O'Leary, Terry. [Education Coordinator of Forest Resource Education Center.] Personal Interview. May 19, 2005.

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