



Bluebirds in Our Backyard

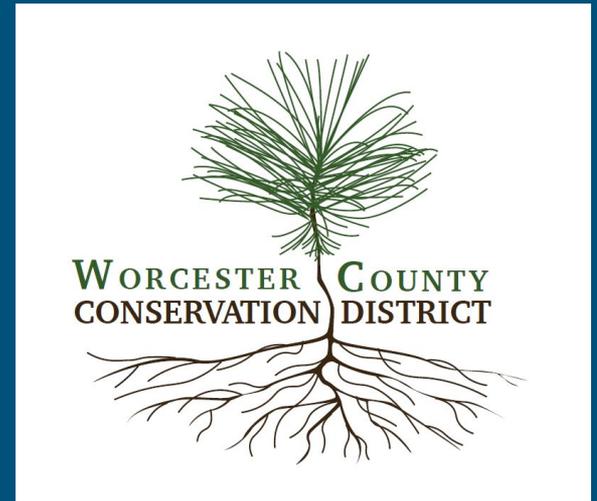


Georgia Albanese
Worcester County Conservation District
Conservation Planner



My Role in WCCD

- Conservation Planner
 - Provide conservation technical assistance, soil testing, and outreach with WCCD - 30%
 - Federally affiliated with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - 70%
 - Work to help landowners address natural resource concerns through implementing conservation practices



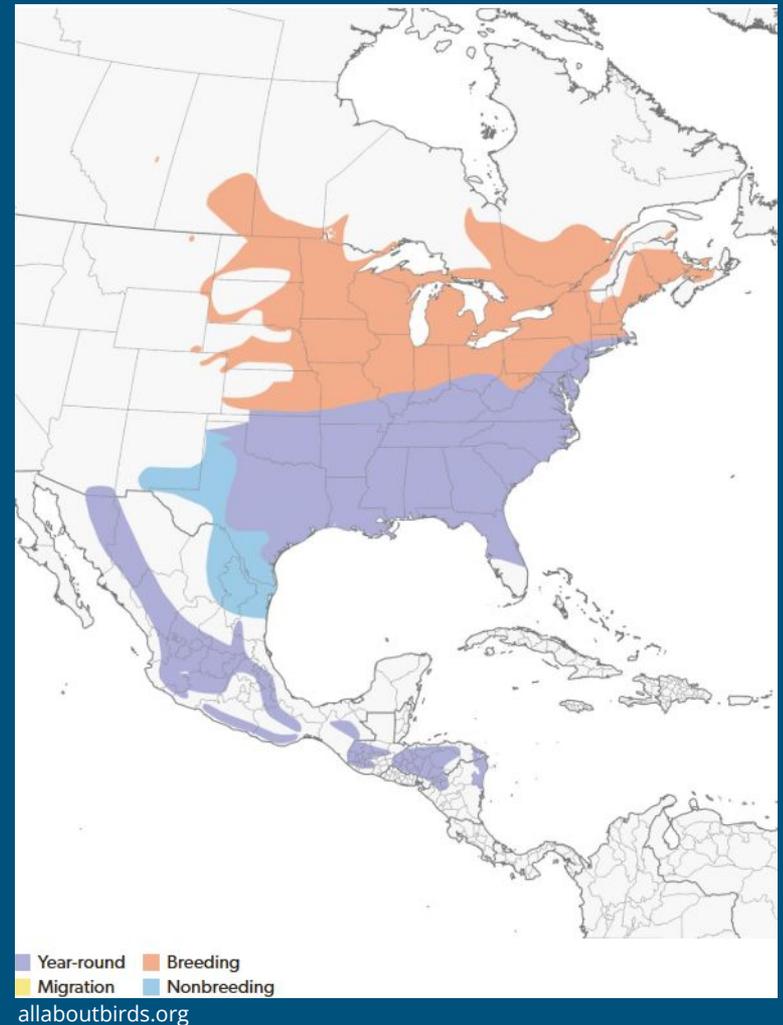
Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

- Native range is Eastern US, Midwest and Mexico
- Striking blue back with an orange chest
- Successful example of conservation efforts recovering a declining species



Migration Patterns

- Medium-distance migrant species
- Most migrate south short distances for the winter
 - Return to same territory in late Feb
- Many broods will overwinter in MA for as long as resources allow



Cultural Significance

- Symbol of happiness and prosperity
- Reflected in art and literature
- Beneficial agricultural bird

BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*).

Length,* about 6½ inches.

Range: Breeds in the United States (west to Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana), southern Canada, Mexico, and Guatemala; winters in the southern half of the eastern United States and south to Guatemala.

Habits and economic status: The bluebird is one of the most familiar tenants of the farm and dooryard. Everywhere it is hailed as the harbinger of spring, and wherever it chooses to reside it is sure of a warm welcome. This bird, like the robin, phoebe, house wren, and some swallows, is very domestic in its habits. Its favorite nesting sites are crannies in the farm buildings or boxes made for its use or natural cavities in old apple trees. For rent the bird pays amply by destroying insects, and it takes no toll from the farm crop. The bluebird's diet consists of 68 per cent of insects to 32 per cent of vegetable matter. The largest items of insect food are grasshoppers first and beetles next, while caterpillars stand third. All of these are harmful except a few of the beetles. The vegetable food consists chiefly of fruit pulp, only an insignificant portion of which is of cultivated varieties. Among wild fruits elderberries are the favorite. From the above it will be seen that the bluebird does no essential harm, but on the contrary eats many harmful and annoying insects. (See Farmers' Bul. 54, pp. 46-48.)



Bluebird's Song



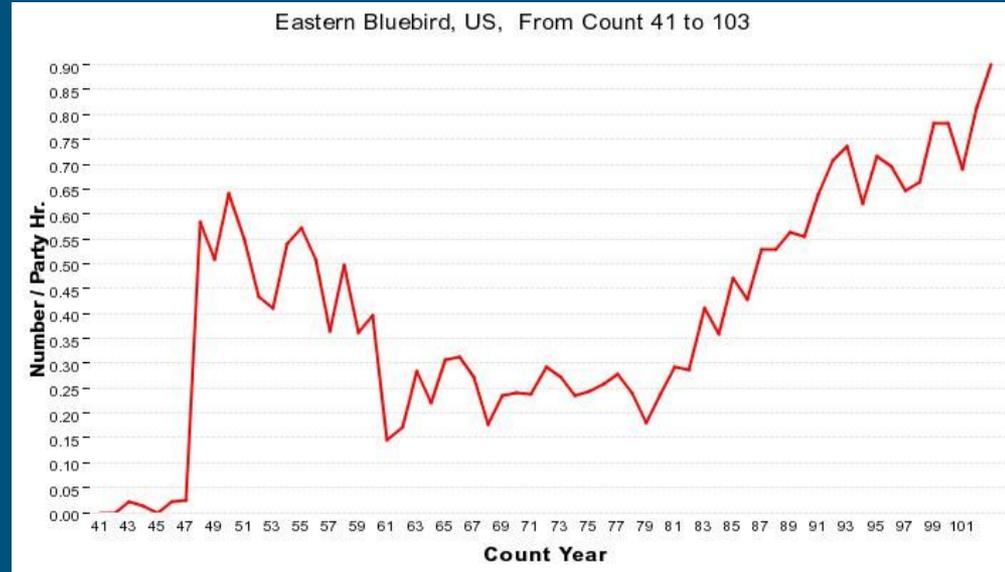
Habitat and Behavior

- Frequents open, grassy meadows/fields
- Cavity nesters
- Territorial nesters
- Feed on insects and wild fruit
- Males attract females through displays of nest building



Historic Challenges

- Population decline 1920-70's
- Pesticide use
 - DDT proved harmful until its ban in 1972
- Habitat loss
 - Increase of development, habitat fragmentation
- Competition with non-native species
 - Introduction of the European House Sparrow, Starling, etc



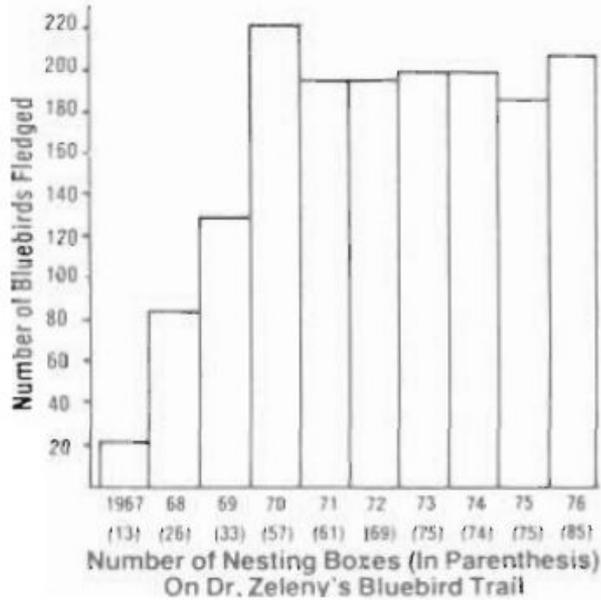
Population tracking 1941-2003
sialis.org

Conservation Efforts

- North American Bluebird Society (NABS) founded in 1978
 - Founded by: Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, bluebird activist and author and Mary D. Janetatos
- Distributed over 1 million copies of the brochure "*Where have all the bluebirds gone?*"
- NABS educated the public on nest boxes and provided resources
- Motivated government agencies to focus on declines in non-game bird

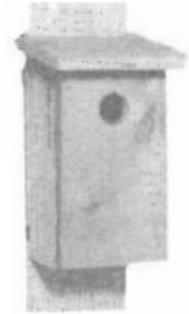


BLUEBIRD TRAILS DO



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This nesting box design is approved by the North American Bluebird Society for general use by bluebirds. Experimental designs may be found on pages 36-39 of this issue.



Western Red
Cedar with
Plywood Top

Use Order
Form to
Place Your
Order.

\$6.50

plus
shipping

*Sialia: The Quarterly Journal of The North American
Bluebird Society*
Volume 1, Number 1,
Winter 1979

Intro to Nest Boxes

- Provides safe habitat to increase local populations
- Install by end of March for best results
- 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ " H x 4" W x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " L (*NRCS specifications*)
- Mounted on pole 5-6' off the ground
- Face S/SE
- Boxes must be 300' between each other
- Predator guards
- Monitoring & data collection
 - Cornell Nest Watch



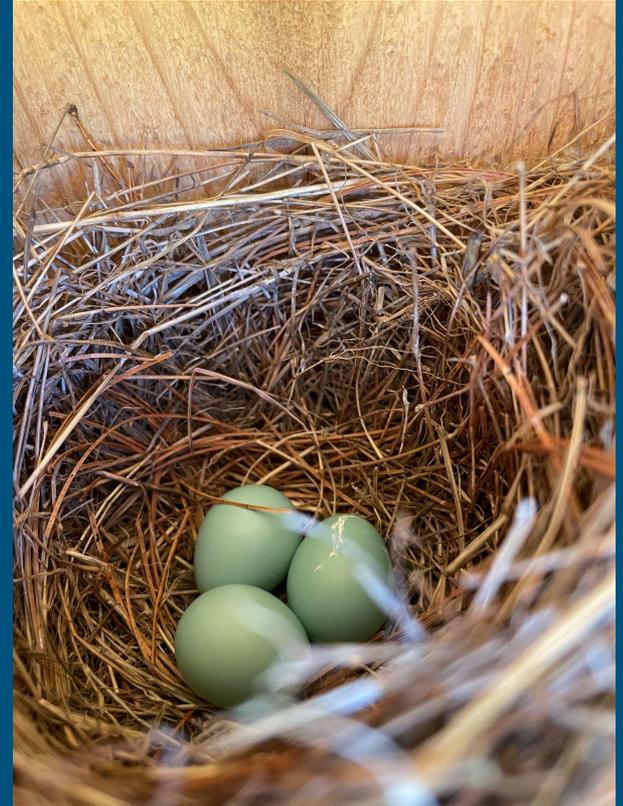
Nesting Overview

- Begin building nests in early/mid April
 - Built with grasses and plant material
- Eggs can be laid as early as late April
- Nesting will continue through early August
- Timeline
 - 1-3 broods per season
 - 2-7 eggs per clutch
 - 11-19 days for incubation
 - 17-21 days from hatching to fledge



A Bluebird Nest

- Short in height
- Defined cup center
- Neatly made
- Light blue eggs



Other Cavity Nesters

- Not only bluebirds will be attracted to the boxes!
- Other species may compete for best nesting spots
- Some positively coexist
 - Tree swallow
- Some are predatory and territorial
 - House sparrow
 - House wren
 - Cowbird



Potential Predators

- Wasps
- Ants
- Snakes
- Squirrels/mice



Predator
baffle



How to Get Involved!

- Build your own bluebird box or buy from WCCD
- Install in your backyard or at local land trust
 - >1 acre of grassy, open landscape
 - Follow best management practices
 - Learn more on 3/24 at NCLT
- NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - Large-scale forestry/ag operations



In Summary

- Bluebird boxes are a great way to contribute to conservation efforts and local bird tracking
- Monitoring regularly is key to success
- Presence of predators and competitors are likely
- Providing homes for a once-declining species is rewarding and fun!



Part 2: Bluebirds in Our Backyard

Tuesday, March 24 5:30-6:30

North County Land Trust

Longview Conservation Area, Ashby

- Live bluebird box install demonstration
- Best management practices for installation and maintenance
- Q&A and discussion
- Pick up your pre-ordered WCCD box!

Sources

<https://archive.org/details/CAT87201973/page/1/mode/2up>

<https://www.sialis.org/history/>

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Bluebird

<https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/Sialia%20Bluebird%20Journals/1.1.pdf>

<https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/nabs-history/>

Questions?

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