

Bluebirds in Our Backyard - 2 Part Series
Part 2- In-Person Discussion and Demonstration

March 24, 2026 5:30-6:30
North County Land Trust
Longview Conservation Area, Ashby MA

- **Eastern bluebird (*Siala sialis*)**
 - Cavity nester
 - A once threatened species
 - Conservation efforts increased populations
 - Male are striking blue color, females coloring a bit duller
 - Females a bit smaller than males
 - Both have bronze chest



female (left) and male (right)

- **Nest Boxes**
 - Provides habitat
 - Safe place to nest and breed
 - For shelter in the winter
 - Increases local populations
 - Promotes conservation/wildlife education
 - Contributes to bird population tracking
- **Box Placement**
 - Among grassy meadows/field habitats
 - Install 5-6 ft from the ground
 - At least 50 ft from treeline
 - Boxes should be ~350 ft from one another, length of a football field approximately
 - Face S/SE, facing open habitat

- Can be installed in pairs to avoid competition (pairs 50ft apart)
- **Preparing the Box**
 - Floor dimensions should be 4" x 5 ½"
 - Walls should be 8 ¾" high
 - Entrance hole should have a diameter of 1½" placed 6" above the floor
 - Refer to NRCS measurements sheet provided
 - Option to number boxes with wood burner
- **Materials for Building Box**
 - Lumber
 - 1 1x6x6; red cedar most weather resilient
 - 2D, 2" long nails for main box build
 - 1.5" nails to secure front wooden predator guard
- **Materials for Box Installation**
 - On post:
 - EMT (Electrical Metal Tubing) Conduit
 - 1, 6-7' long piece, ¾" diameter for post itself
 - 1, 1' long piece, ½" diameter for ground receiver/anchor post
 - 2 hex bolts, ¼", 3" long and flat washers for attaching box to post
 - Optional PVC predator guard or predator baffle, if not using built-in wooden predator guard
 - On fence post:
 - (2) 3 ½" star drive coated deck screws
- **Tools**
 - Standard hammer
 - Sledge hammer or mallet
 - Electric drill
 - 1 ½" Forstner drill bit for drilling entrance hole
- **Box-on-Post Installation**
 - Attach the box the pole using the hex bolts and washer
 - Site selection
 - Drive the anchoring pipe into the ground with sledgehammer/mallet
 - Slide the pole with box into anchoring pipe
 - Orient proper direction
- **Monitoring**
 - Recommended to monitor weekly
 - Materials
 - Data collection sheet, disposable gloves, small handheld extension mirror, step ladder

- Check box contents in the middle of the day/afternoon
 - During calm weather, no rain or heavy winds
- Approach box quietly and calmly
- Knock on back of box lightly before monitoring
 - If mother bird remains on nest when opened, carefully close it and return to check it at a later time
- Don't leave box open for more than 10 seconds at a time
- Make observations swiftly and record
- Stop monitoring when 16 days old to avoid premature fledge



- **Deterring predators**

- Predator guards- for mice, squirrels, raccoons
 - Square hole guard on box
 - Metal/PVC predator baffles
- Wasps
 - Spread ivory soap on box ceiling



- **Other Cavity Nesters**

- **House Sparrow**

- Invasive species
- Exhibits aggressive, territorial behaviors
- Nests are tall, messy, nonsymmetrical
- Made with grasses and/or trash pieces
- Brown/white speckled eggs



- **Tree Swallow**

- Native species
- Can coexist with bluebirds and ward of predators
- Territorial
- Nests similar to bluebirds but taller
- Nests made with primarily feathers
- White eggs



- House Wren
 - Native species
 - Can outcompete bluebirds or attack existing nests
 - Will nest in boxes too close to treeline
 - Nests with twigs
 - Brown speckled eggs



- Brown Headed Cowbird
 - Brood parasite
 - Do not nest in their own nests
 - More common in Great Plains region



These three brown-spotted cowbird eggs were laid in an Eastern Phoebe's nest.

Photo © Melanie Schneider, Cornell Lab Nestwatch

- **Nesting timeline**

- Bluebirds will begin building nests early/mid April
- Eggs can be laid as early as late April
- Nesting continues through early August
- Some broods will nest again on top of a previous nest
 - Others will not return to box after babies fledge
- Broods will often return to the same box each season
- 1-3 broods per season
- 2-7 eggs per clutch
- 11-19 days for incubation
- 17-21 days from hatching to fledge



- **Maintenance**

- Regular maintenance
 - Check weekly for signs of predatory invaders
 - Remove house sparrow nests (allowed because non-native species)
 - Illegal to remove other non-target species such as wrens, cowbirds
 - Ensure pole is installed straight, facing appropriate orientation
 - Once bluebirds have fledged, wait 2 weeks before removing their nest during nesting season
 - Allows for opportunity for another nest
 - Scrubbing boxes of feces may be needed. In that case, remove box and scrub with a brush and a 1:10 bleach-to-water solution, rinse and air dry
- Yearly maintenance
 - Remove all nests in fall and clean boxes thoroughly with scrub or hose rinse, and clean for winter with a 1:10 bleach-to-water solution
 - Potentially clean again in springtime/late winter if the overwintering broods leave remnants
 - Check for structural integrity and that box is secure
 - Replace damaged boxes as needed

- **Data/Observation Collection**

- NestWatch by Cornell
- iNaturalist
- Contributes to global bird tracking and changes in nesting/breeding patterns as our environment changes

Sample Data Collection Table

Date/Time	Box #	Weather /Temp	Nest Status	Nest Material	Species	# Eggs	Est. date eggs laid	Est. date eggs hatched	Est. date fledged	Pests?

Sources

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Bluebird
<https://nestwatch.org/learn/focal-species/eastern-bluebird/>
<https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/Getting%20Started%20Factsheet%20July2021.pdf>
<https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/PDF/NABSFactsheetMonitoring.pdf>