



**Virginia  
Bluebird  
Society**

# The Bird Box

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## October 2007

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### Calendar

**Today!** Send in your registration form for VBS **November 3** meeting in **Roanoke**.

**Today:** Mail in your trail data. See details, page 6.

**November 3, Sat.:** VBS Annual Meeting, Program, Board Meeting and Program. 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. See page 2.

Earl Morris Bluebird Presentations,  
Details: e-mail emorris@ntelos.net  
**November 7, Wed.,** 3:30 p.m.,  
Modern Arts Club, Roanoke Valley;  
**November 13, Tue.,** 10:45 a.m.,  
Roanoke Valley Garden Club,  
Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs;  
**November 14, Wed.,** 10:00 a.m.,  
Roslyn Hills Garden Club, Roanoke  
Council of Garden Clubs.

**December:** Consider giving a VBS membership as a gift. Check the Web site for details or contact Anne Little.

**Winter:** Walk your trails. As needed, repair and relocate boxes.

**February 1:** Deadline for your articles and photos for the March Bird Box.

Anne Little Bluebird Presentation:  
**February 14, Thur.,** 7:30 p.m.,  
Monticello Bird Club, Ivy Creek  
Natural Area Community Room,  
Charlottesville.

**February 23, Sat.:** VBS Board Meeting. 10:00 a.m., DGIF Bldg., Richmond. Open to all members.

### Dogwood: Food, Shelter, Beauty

**T**he state tree of Virginia, American Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), can be found in the understory of mixed hardwood forests throughout the Commonwealth and is a popular tree for landscaping in yards because of this tree's beautiful spring foliage that occurs naturally in color variations from white to salmon pink. This dogwood's leaves often turn a brilliant red in the fall and make it an equally attractive option for autumn color.

People have used the particularly hard wood of the dogwood for golf club heads, weaving shuttles, and mallet heads. Medicinally, the plant's bark was used as a quinine substitute during the Civil War. A tea from the bark was used to induce sweating to break fevers, and the fruit soaked in brandy was used to calm stomach acid. Nowadays dogwoods are far more valuable for their beauty and the food they produce for wildlife.

The fruit, seeds, flowers, twigs, bark, and leaves are all used by various wildlife species for food. The waxy red fruit ripens in September to late October and contains a "stone" that typically holds two seeds. The high calcium and fat content of the fruit makes it a valuable food source for at least 36 species of birds including bluebirds, turkeys, and grouse. A number of mammals like chipmunks and foxes also eat the fruit, and deer and rabbits browse the foliage and twigs.

Dogwoods can reach heights of 30 feet and prefer slightly acidic organic soils. Many dogwoods in native habitats are being affected by anthracnose, which can kill or weaken them. Some cultivars of the native *Cornus florida* being sold in the nursery trade may have some resistance to anthracnose. But there are other native *Cornus* species that can add variety to your landscape and also benefit wildlife.

Red Osier Dogwood (*Cornus Red Osier*) is a medium-to-tall shrub that has dark red branches and twigs and can form dense thickets. It blooms in late May to early June, a bit later than *Cornus florida*, so it can give your yard another burst of color in late spring. Its white-to-bluish fruit appears in late August or early September and is a good fall/ winter food source.

Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is a low-growing plant that often forms hedge rows and can be used for stream bank stabilization or as a plant screen. It grows slowly, averages six feet in height, and blooms in June or July. The white fruit grows on red stalks, which make for interesting fall color.

For gardeners looking for ways to make their yards attractive to wildlife, these native dogwoods are excellent choices for bluebirds and many other bird and wildlife species. Their spring flowering and bright red fall foliage also make them quite attractive to people.

– Julie Kutruff, Fairfax County



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**Promoting bluebirds and other cavity nesters**

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# **The Bird Box**

Issue 9.2

Newsletter of the  
**Virginia Bluebird Society**  
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Our **e-mail address** is:  
vbs@virginiabluebirds.org  
If you have a new e-mail address, or have recently changed it, please let us know.

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**We welcome your written items and artwork** (photos and drawings) for *The Bird Box*! Send your materials by e-mail or on diskette to Sarah or Bob.

## **Register Now – November 3 Is Almost Here!** **VBS Meeting Moved to Roanoke**

**T**he Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center at Explore Park in **Roanoke** will host the 2007 VBS Annual Meeting on **Saturday, November 3**. This is a change of venue from the Winchester site reported in the July *Bird Box*. The date remains the same.

Bluebirders from around the state will gather between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. in the Visitor Center auditorium to register, see old friends, and exchange information. VBS President **Anne Little** of Fredericksburg will lead the program, which includes demonstrations and talks by five very active members, an awards ceremony (see page 3), and election of the next Board. The box lunch break is from noon to 1 p.m. All are welcome to attend the Board meeting afterward.

Explore Park is a non-profit living history museum surrounded by 1,100 scenic acres offering outdoor recreation. History lovers can walk to and visit the three living history sites that emphasize Native Americans, a frontier fort, and 19<sup>th</sup> century living. An active outdoors person can utilize the 12 miles of mountain bike trails, five miles of hiking trails, and two-mile river fishing area. Appropriate outdoor clothing and shoes are recommended at Explore Park.

VBS members will not have to pay the fee for Explore Park to attend the meeting at the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center. Explore Park is on the Roanoke River Parkway, which is off the Blue Ridge Parkway at milepost 115. Brown and white marker signs along the Parkway guide visitors to the appropriate exit. For details, see below and also visit the VBS Web site, [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org), and click on Upcoming Events.

## **Details on the VBS Annual Meeting**

**I**n mid-September Anne Little mailed all members an invitation to the **VBS November 3 Annual Meeting** and program in Roanoke. The mailing included registration materials. (If you have misplaced it, you can find the materials on the VBS Web site as noted above, or call Anne at 540-373-4594.)

There is a \$15 fee per person, which covers box lunches and the auditorium rental. If you do not use the Internet, you may mail your check, payable to VBS, to VBS Annual Meeting, 726 William Street, Fredericksburg VA 22401. Be sure to include your name(s), address, and choice of turkey, beef, or vegetarian for your sandwich.

Many members from out of town will stay at the Holiday Inn at 4468 Starkey Road, Roanoke (phone: 866-774-4401). Mention "Virginia Bluebird Society" when you make your reservations. The Holiday Inn is approximately 10 miles from I-81, and from the hotel the Park is another 10 miles further north along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Roanoke River Parkway. Those not overnighting should allow time to traverse 21 miles from I-81 Exit 143 to the Park.

**Directions to the Park:** Take I-81 to exit 143 at Roanoke. Take I-581/US-220 South into Roanoke. As I-581 ends, continue on US-220 South and turn right to the Blue Ridge Parkway entrance. Turn north onto the Blue Ridge Parkway. Follow brown and white Explore Park markers to milepost 115. Turn right onto Roanoke River Parkway and follow it to the Blue Ridge Visitor Center.

## Awards to Be Given at VBS Meeting

**B**e sure you are there at the VBS Annual Meeting on November 3 to applaud the awardees for this year.

**County Coordinator of the Year: Vickie Fuquay, Pittsylvania Co. and Danville.** A County Coordinator can choose to do the minimum job, which is to collect the data for the county and pass that data on to Charlie Chambers. A County Coordinator who wants to go the extra mile can send articles to local papers and do speaking engagements within their county. These are the ones who deserve special recognition.

**Bluebirder of the Year: Nan LaRue, Newport News.** This award is given to the individual who promotes bluebirds in Virginia by example. This person reaches out to schools, groups and others; promoting good bluebird management techniques in the field and helping many more learn to love and care for the bluebird.

**Volunteer of the Year: Milly Collela, Nelson Co.** This award is given to an individual who helps promote and enhance the VBS by giving of their time and energy. This individual helps VBS grow and flourish and in doing this also helps the bluebirds of Virginia grow and flourish.

**VBS Heritage Award: Anne Little, Fredericksburg, our VBS President.** This award is not given every year by this organization. This award recognizes an individual who has been a long time Bluebirder. This is a special person who lives and breathes bluebirds, and has spent many years promoting bluebirds and the love of bluebirds.

– Barbara Chambers, Fairfax County

## My Great Crested Flycatcher Nest

**D**o you remember your excitement when you first found a bluebird nest in one of your boxes? That's how I felt on June 9 as I opened my "flycatcher box" and discovered a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers were using it!

In March 2003 *Audubon* magazine described how to build a nest box for Great Crested Flycatchers, complete with plans. I built the box, measuring 6 by 6 inches on the bottom by 12 inches tall, and having a 2-inch round hole opening. I mounted the box on a piece of EMT that slides over a one-inch water pipe, so that the box is about ten feet off the ground.

Great Crested Flycatchers are more often heard than seen. They live in the tops of trees hawking insects and calling out a rising *wheep*, or a rolling *prrrrreet*. The Great Crested has a gray head and crest, a lemon-yellow belly and under-tail coverts, and a rusty tail. The upper parts are olive-green, and the bird shows two white wing bars. It is a Neotropical migrant that can be found in heavily wooded areas throughout eastern U.S. in spring and summer. Like all other secondary cavity nesters, it faces threats of loss of habit and competition from non-native starlings. Its nest is a cup of grass, weeds, bark strips, and rootlets that is lined with feathers and often a snake skin.

"Prepare and persist, and the elusive flycatcher could turn up in your neighborhood," the *Audubon* article said. That proved to be quite true. For four years, I had nothing to show for my efforts. Then in June, I opened the box to find five brown eggs in a nest full of Blue Jay feathers! The parents were calling from a nearby tree. I posted the news on the VA-BIRD e-mail list and Dr. Roger Clapp responded: "Crested Flycatchers are among the rarest of birds to be found nesting in boxes – I have records of 5-10 nests over the years, including one that nested in a hollowed out log in my backyard for a number of years."

Unfortunately, the birds were not successful in their nesting attempt. Three weeks after I first found the nest, I discovered the babies were gone. The entrance hole had been chewed up a bit, too, so I suspect that squirrels must have gotten in. The box was mounted near some trees that had filled out over the years, providing access for the squirrels. I will move the box for next season and hope I get that thrill once again.

– Phil Kenny, Fairfax County

## From Other Bluebird Skies

**From Ohio:** The Ohio Bluebird Society was formed in 1987 and now has over 700 members.

**From Montana:** Believe it or not! The Mountain Bluebird Trails organization, reported this story in its fall newsletter. Maria Lovely, seven years old, was among 40 people who attended an April 7 bluebird presentation in Big Timber. Many questions were asked, including four by Maria. Two days later, Maria's mother called the speaker to say that her daughter had signed up 20 new members and had 10 more interested. By the time the speaker delivered 90 boxes and guides to Maria, the other 10 had joined. After that, she signed up at least three more, for a total of 23 people that a 7 year-old convinced about the need to help the Mountain Bluebird.



Great Crested Flycatcher nest box, showing squirrel damage around entrance hole  
(Photo: Phil Kenny)





William Henderson installs a box with a memory plaque on Danville's Adopt-a-Box trail.

## Danville's Adopt-a-Box Program

**D**anville has been the home of bluebird lovers and landlords since the mid-1980s, but had no established bluebird trails until March, when my husband and I placed three bluebird boxes in a cemetery near my house. With the help of the VBS and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), the numbers quickly grew to 27 boxes in five area cemeteries. As word spread, I began to get calls asking if I could put up houses along the River Walk Trail in Dan Daniel Memorial Park. I needed a way to fund it so we began the Adopt-a-Box program.

I realized that an Adopt-a-Box program might be too much for me to handle on my own, and Dianne McMahan

became the Adoption Trail Coordinator. Harry Pruitt was building our houses, but we needed a way to get this idea off the ground. We enlisted a local nursery, Raywood Landscape Center, as our headquarters. They already had a large birding supply department that sold houses and mealworms for bluebirds. With a Raywood subsidy, I created brochures describing the program and providing the order blank for purchasing the houses.

In our program, you adopt a box in memory or honor of someone. It's a wonderful way to honor the bird lover who has everything for birthdays or Christmas and at the same time provide housing for our feathered friends. We also printed beautiful acknowledgment cards for the purchasers to send to the honorees. We take pictures of the houses when we mount them, and send the photo and the location of the box to the appropriate party.

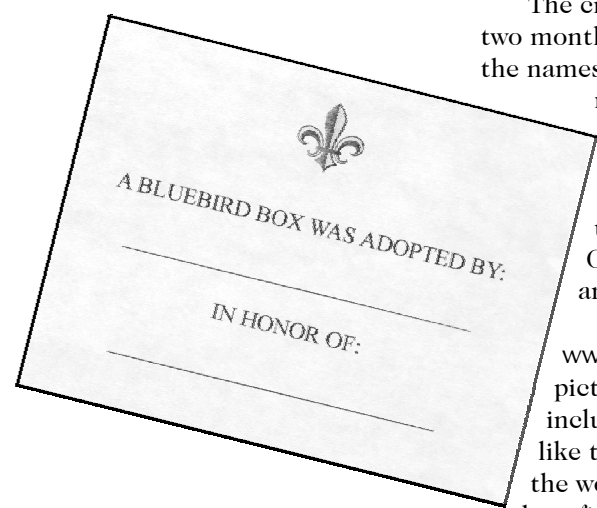
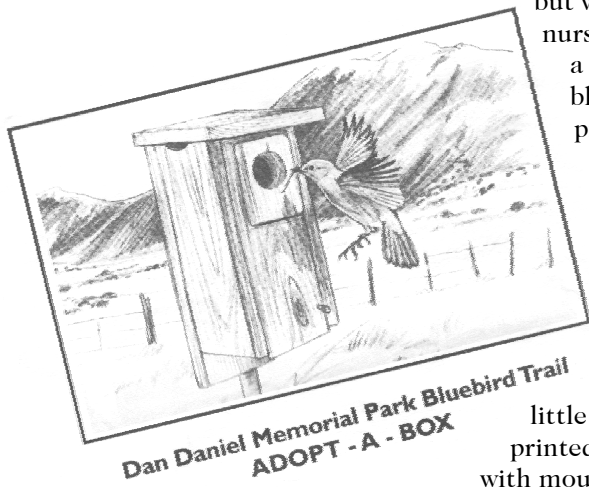
The houses are priced at \$55, which lets the nursery make a little money for its trouble. In return, the nursery has the memory plaques printed and mounted on the front of the boxes. Each house comes complete with mounting posts, predator guard, and installation. Local VBS members and an employee of the Danville Parks and Recreation Dept help place the boxes along the Dan Daniel walking trail. The boxes are monitored weekly.

The citizens of Danville have been overwhelmingly supportive. In just over two months they adopted 40 boxes. People love walking along the trail, reading the names of those honored there. A few boxes have been adopted because some residents realize their yards don't provide the proper habitat.

Getting the word out has been our challenge. I did a radio interview that aired one Sunday morning. The next day the station played parts of the interview during each local news broadcast. We sold 17 units that week to radio listeners. I contacted a weekly newspaper in Chatham about our program; a subscriber in Maryland saw the article and ordered a box in memory of someone from our area.

My daughter, who lives in Virginia Beach, set up a Web site, [www.vabluebirdconnection.com](http://www.vabluebirdconnection.com), where we bluebirders can share our pictures and stories. We are adding a page for the Adopt-a-Box program, including order forms and monitoring sheets. After setting up a program like this, the best way to promote it is to have enthusiastic birders spread the word. The excitement in Southside is contagious and has only served to benefit our beautiful bluebirds.

– Vickie Fuquay, Danville, Pittsylvania County Coordinator



## Q & A Column

### Old Nests

**Q**uestion: Why do we bother to clean out the old nests in our bluebird boxes?

**A**nswer: There are actually two reasons why the VBS protocol recommends removal of the old nest after each fledging. When the five founders of VBS were getting started, they disagreed about whether to leave a nest for bluebirds to use again, or instead to clean it out as all good homemakers want to do! So the founders left half of the nests in their boxes and removed the rest. They found that the female bluebirds would build new nests either way. But a new nest built on top of an old one sat too close to the entrance hole and was more vulnerable to predators, even with our Noel/raccoon guard.

The other reason is to rid the box of mites, earwigs, spiders, and the occasional blowfly larva that can infest the nest. When nests are removed after each nesting, these pests are less likely to appear in the new nests, and that cuts down on the growing problems for the hatchlings. All birds seem to have mites. We don't need to give them more!

*Do you have a question for the Q&A Column? Send it to Sarah McDade at sarahmcdade@aol.com, or call 703-560-9899.*

## NABS Meeting Migrates to Nebraska

**T**he annual spring migration of Sandhill Cranes is the occasion for the major Great Plains Sandhill Crane and Bluebird Festival planned for Kearney, Nebraska, March 6-9, 2008. Bluebirds Across Nebraska and the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) have joined forces in inviting all VBS members. Speakers are noted birders from around the country, and field trips will include viewing Sandhill Cranes, prairie dog villages, the Rainwater Basin, Prairie Chicken Leks, and local cultural attractions during a gathering that celebrates the 30th anniversary of NABS. For more information, visit [www.bbne.org](http://www.bbne.org) or write to Bluebirds Across Nebraska, P.O. Box 67157, Lincoln, NE 68506-7157.



Will we actually see this weather again? A foggy morning at the 14th green on a golf course in Gainesville last winter. (Photo: Ed Knepley)



Mary Janetatos and Ron Kingston at the NABS convention in Georgia, where Ron received the Mary Janetatos Award for Distinguished Service.

## Bluebird Scientists Gathered

The largest gathering of bluebird scientists in the world met at the NABS convention at the University of Georgia September 21-23. VBS member **Ron Kingston** of Charlottesville received the Mary Janetatos Award for Distinguished Service to NABS. Ron has served as chairman of the organization's speaker bureau and has attended 26 consecutive NABS conventions!

VBS Board member **Brian Swanson** of Gainesville was elected to the office of NABS First Vice President for a three-year term. Other Virginians in attendance were **Priscilla Kingston, Marci Swanson, and Mark and Jean Raab.**

NABS will meet again in Nebraska in March. See article, left.

## State Legislatures Like Bluebirds

Four states have adopted two species of bluebirds as their state birds.

Missouri: Eastern Bluebird, 1927

New York: Eastern Bluebird, 1970 (replacing American Robin)

Idaho: Mountain Bluebird, 1931

Nevada: Mountain Bluebird, 1967



## Please Send in Data Now

'Tis the season to be forwarding your monitoring numbers to your county coordinator if you have one, or Charlie Chambers if your county is not "officially" represented. Visit the VBS Web site, [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org), and click on County Coordinators to find yours listed with name, telephone, and e-mail address. If you cannot find a County Coordinator, contact Barbara Chambers, State Coordinator, at 703-978-6609. Charlie's address is: 8911 Moreland Lane, Annandale, VA 22003.

## Late Fledglings

Phil Kenny of Vienna, Fairfax County, reported the late-season fledging of four bluebirds on September 10.

## Forty-six Trails!

The most densely developed county in Virginia, Fairfax, has bluebird trail leaders reporting fledges from 46 trails!

## Changed Your E-mail Address?

Please notify Anne Little at [thegate@cox.net](mailto:thegate@cox.net) if you are a VBS member and have changed your e-mail address.

## Caption Contest

Send us your ideas for captions for these two photos from Earl Morris (right and on facing page) from an extremely successful box trail near Roanoke. We've filled in our own entries, but we'd much rather publish your creative suggestions!

## Book Review

### Letters from Eden

**B**irders are familiar with author Julie Zickefoose because she is a major contributor and illustrator for *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and she travels the country giving talks, promoting her books, and birding with others at festivals. Bluebirders may have read her excellent booklet, *Enjoying Bluebirds More*.

When Julie is home in Ohio, however, she is tending to the myriad of jobs that her large country property affords a devoted naturalist. That is what her book, *Letters from Eden: A Year at Home, in the Woods*, is about. Published by Houghton Mifflin in 2006, this is a compilation of Julie's nature musings and happenings on her many acres of woods and meadows. The essays are offered to us season by season with delightful illustrations. A member of the Ohio Bluebird Society, Julie tells us about the bluebirds and wildlife on her property through words and artwork. A colorful bluebird painting splashes the face page of the Winter section.

I bought my copy before Christmas last year, looking forward to an occasional relaxing chapter once in a while. I took the book with me to Florida, deciding it would be great breakfast and coffee reading, a superior fare to the depressing local newspaper. One day, fellow VBS member Barbara Chambers, vacationing in the same community, called to tell me that Julie Zickefoose was doing a book tour and was in town to speak at the local wildlife center. I grabbed my book and met Barbara there, joining a standing-room-only crowd. As usual, Julie was a marvelous speaker. Later we got in line and Julie autographed our books with personalized messages. Why were they personalized? Julie had met us once before when she spoke at the VBS annual meeting in Annandale.

*Letters from Eden* would be especially popular with women and would make a great gift. If not in stock at your local bookstore, it can be ordered, and it is also available through a number of online vendors. – Sarah McDade



Said the bluebird, "A funny thing happened on the way to the nest box."  
(Photo: Earl Morris)

## “Coon” Guards

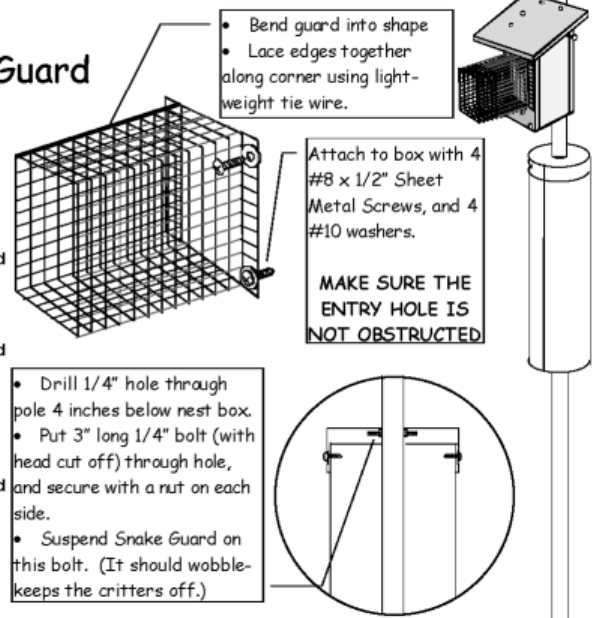
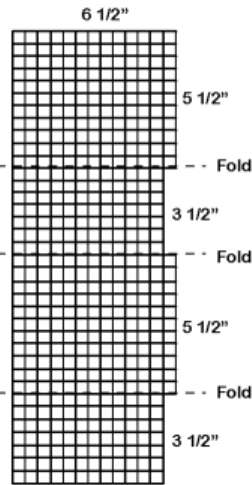
Some bluebirders refer to them as raccoon or “coon” guards, others call them “cat” guards, and still others use the name Noel, after Mid-Westerner Jim Noel, who designed them. Some non-bluebirders refer to them as the “Front Porch.” Whatever you call them, VBS has always promoted their use. In light of Anne Little’s predation horror story in the July *Bird Box*, you will want to add the “Front Porch” to all of your boxes too! See our Web site, [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org), for complete instructions and illustrations (see example diagram, right).

Building Noel guards would be a good winter project. All boxes on my trails have them. I don’t want woodpeckers or anything furry grabbing those special eggs or hatchlings inside my nest boxes.

– Sarah McDade

## Nest Box Predator Guards

### Cat/Raccoon Guard



Said the male bluebird to his lady, “Honey, have you noticed the neighbors took down some trees?”  
(Photo: Earl Morris)

## NABS Membership Discount

NABS offers half-price memberships for 2007-2008 to VBS members. Joining NABS for \$15 entitles you to the quarterly newsletter, *Bluebird*, and supports bluebird conservation and education. To join, send a check with “A+” noted on the memo line, to NABS, P.O. Box 43, Miamiville, OH 45147.

## Lots of Free Bluebird Reading

NABS has posted on its website, [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org), back issues of its newsletter from Winter 1979 to Fall 2005. The older editions were entitled *Sialia*, and the newer ones are *Bluebird*. At the home page, click on Publications and you can explore the index and back issues.

## Visit Our Web Site

The VBS Web site offers nest box plans, trail monitoring protocol, trail data forms, news, and links to other useful sites:

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

## How to Join Us

Send your name, address, phone number, and/or e-mail 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 can be downloaded from the VBS Web site:

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

## Bluebird Suet

This letter to VBS arrived recently:

*Dear Anne,*

I've been using the suet recipe from the VBS website: Suet For Bluebirds - 1 cup crunchy peanut butter, 1 cup lard, 2 cups quick oats, 2 cups cornmeal, 1 cup flour, 1/3 cup sugar, berries like currants optional. Mix dry ingredients. Melt peanut butter & lard together, and mix with dry ingredients. Press into pan, cool, cut into squares and freeze until needed.

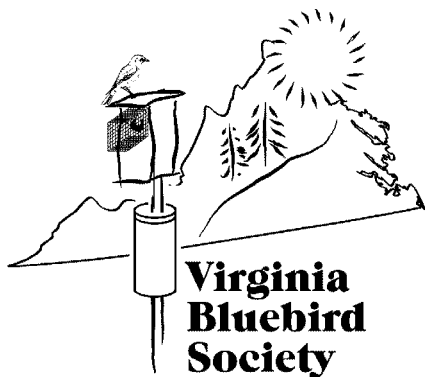
With the hot weather, I started using 1/2 cup of peanut butter and 1/2 cup of lard. It results in a more crumbly texture and it doesn't get messy in the sun. The Bluebirds seem to like it more crumbly so I'll continue to make it that way.

*Sincerely,*

*Don Elsass*

*North Carolina Bluebird Society member*

*[Editor's note: The recipe posted on our Web site comes from Martha Sargent of Alabama. With her husband Bob, Martha is a pre-eminent follower of the habits of hummingbirds. The Sargents band them and have discovered that at least 13 types spend their winters on the East Coast! This suet might appeal to many species of birds, but bluebirds especially enjoy the crumbly version.]*



Virginia Bluebird Society  
726 William Street  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

**DATED  
MATERIAL**