

The Bird Box

Spring 2013 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org

With Thanks from Montross Middle School



The faculty and students of Montross Middle School would like to show our appreciation to the Virginia Bluebird Society for their very generous donation of a web cam box for our bluebird trail.

Two years ago as part of our after school's CLC program, a tutoring and enrichment opportunity for low achieving students, we decided to start a student group to look at the environment of our school and investigate what we could do to improve it. Starting a bluebird nest box trail seemed like a great idea! One staff member donated eight bluebird boxes which were in need of much repair. The students set to cleaning, repairing and painting these boxes, as many had been painted black! Next we purchased some angle iron stakes from our local hardware store, to which we wired the boxes. Finally our cafeteria supplied us with some large catering sized vegetable cans, which we painted green, punched holes in their bottoms and threaded on to the posts for predator guards. The students enjoyed deciding where to place the boxes in order to meet suggested directional and distance needs for the birds. For less than \$60 we had an eight box trail.

We waited in anticipation, and slowly but surely the birds came. After the first year our trail was deemed a success, with four boxes active, some with multiple nests in the season. Buoyed by this success and assisted by a DEQ classroom grant, our second season saw our

trail renovated with four additional boxes, better posts and predator guards and the relocation of boxes that hadn't had any activity.

Here in the Northern Neck of Virginia we would never have been able to afford a nest cam without the VBS grant. With assistance from our school's technology coordinator we are hoping to capture the nest cam's video feed and stream it either onto our school web site or create our own website for the bluebirds, with its own URL.

We are installing the nest cam box on a post that has already seen previous activity in the hope that we will get a



Photo by Nicky

successful box again this year.

Again our thanks for this wonderful opportunity, and we hope our story will motivate other schools to become involved with bluebird activities.

By Nancy Joel, 7th Grade Life Science Teacher,
Montross Middle School, Virginia.

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Photo and text by Sarah McDade

Newsletter of the

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We welcome your written items and artwork (photos and drawings) for The Bird Box!

E-mail your materials to Doug Rogers.

On the mild winter afternoon of January 19, 2013 VBS President Carmen Bishop posed with Charlie Chambers and Phil Kenny at the newly installed chestnut nest box made by Paul Davis in memory of the late VBS co-founder Barbara J. Chambers. Adorned with a bronze plaque that reads, "In Memory of Barbara Chambers

1929-2012, Co-Founder of the Virginia Bluebird Society", the box joins 21 others at the trail created by Barbara and Charlie Chambers at Meadowlark Gardens, a popular showpiece garden park in Vienna, Fairfax County.



Nest Cams At School - An Update!

Article and Photo By Vickie Fuquay

I am happy to report that the schools have finally gotten word about our School Nest-cam Grant Program. Carmen composed a wonderful flyer that was sent out to county coordinators that can be forwarded out to schools throughout Virginia. My email account lit up right after Thanksgiving and has now slowed down to a mere trickle. More than 30 inquiries and grant applications have been sent in and after much reviewing, talking to teachers, IT staff leaders and principals we have awarded 8 more camera boxes to schools. With the money we received we were able to place nest-cam boxes equipped with poles and predator guards in 10 schools. We are keeping a file of applications hoping to be able to repeat our offer as more funds become available. Keep the applications coming... Keep spreading the word for not only are students excited and catching the vision of the bluebird conservation we started long ago... but the bluebirds are reaping the benefits and thriving as well.

Send applications to

vickiefuquay@comcast.net

Or mail to:

Vickie Fuquay

222 Oakmont Trail

Danville VA 24541



A Tribute to Barbara Chambers

By Julie Kutruff

While I am honored to be asked to write a piece about Barbara Chambers, I didn't expect to be writing this now, maybe when Barbara was 93 or 103. Barbara Chambers always had more spunk and energy than most people I know and she always had a tremendous capacity for getting things done and bringing people into her very large network.

Barbara and Charlie were in on the "ground floor" of starting VBS. It all grew from a bluebird trail at Pohick Bay Regional Park. I asked Barbara if she would be interested in helping and of course she said "yes". I also put a small ad in the paper asking for volunteers and I got more people than we needed for one trail; rather than lose the interest, we got some involved with the trail at Gunston Hall and nearby Pohick Bay Golf Course; both already had boxes that were not being monitored or cared for. Quickly this little network germinated the idea to start a state-wide organization and things grew exponentially from that point forward with Barb and Charlie putting in a lot of time and effort with Anne and Carl Little and others to form VBS.

From the three trails VBS started with to the hundreds of trails and over 14,000 bluebirds that were fledged last year, Barbara established a legacy of action and positive results. She was also one of the driving forces behind developing our monitoring protocols so there would be consistency from trail to trail and she helped to set up the model of how to run trails with a team of volunteers. Barbara also had her hand in developing many of the training materials and in conducting hundreds of bluebird training classes all over Virginia. Barbara always proved to have an amazing networking ability.

I can still remember needing a graphic of how many county coordinators we had and where they were located across the state; I printed a black and white map of the Commonwealth, with the counties on it, and colored in every place we had a coordinator. Barb took the map and each time she presented it at a meeting more parts of the map were colored. Soon it was rare not to have some geographic area of Virginia represented by someone. Barb found and then kept up with all of these folks all over the state making sure they had what they needed, traveling to give talks in their counties, offering coaching advice to county coordinators trying to find monitors or start

new trails and she often got county coordinators to share their success stories in the newsletter.

We went to the NABS convention in Dubuque Iowa, and a new network was formed with the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Barb maintained her network there through a series of ups and downs with that organization over the years. More recently, she took on a board role with NABS while also maintaining all of the things she was doing with VBS. Barbara's network of friends, family, birders and other colleagues extended all over the country and maybe beyond. She touched a lot of people in her career as a teacher and then in her retirement "career" as bird lover and conservationist.

I met Barbara and Charlie in the 1980's when I got involved with doing Bald Eagle surveys on Mason Neck and soon Barbara was weaving me in to her network of birders. She got me involved for a while going to some Northern Virginia Bird Club meetings and with Christmas Bird Counts.... It is amazing how many people she personally connected me with over the years so it should not have been a surprise to me when Barb would take up something new like bird banding and next thing I knew she was meeting new people at the banding station at Kiptopeke and getting them to work with VBS in Virginia Beach and the tidewater area.

There are so many stories and experiences I could recount to illustrate what a full and remarkable life Barbara led and how she touched a vast network of people. I smile to think how Barbara turned retirement into a whole new set of endeavors that likely kept her busier and more connected than she was when she was actually working! Barbara did what she loved and what she believed mattered, which I will always admire.

I feel content to acknowledge that there just aren't enough words or good adjectives to describe or capture the essence of Barbara Chambers and what she meant to all who knew her in VBS. I am blessed to have known and loved such a remarkable friend. I also know that VBS would not be the organization it is today without the contribution and love Barbara Chambers put into it.

And for certain, Barbara is missed.

Why Do We Monitor Bluebird Nestboxes???

Article by Doug Rogers, Editor

Why do we monitor bluebird nestboxes??

My best guess is that the answer will vary according to who you ask. Here are some possibilities:

- We love being out in Nature and doing something to protect it.
- We love to see love and courtship, babies being born (make that, hatched) and the cycle of life going on.
- We love seeing the wonderful colors of male bluebirds.
- We love counting all of our “grandbirds.”
- We feel a kinship with an organization that brought a species back from the brink of extinction.
- We feel like we have made the world a better place - at least for the bluebirds.

If those reasons aren't enough, someone has to maintain the nest boxes to ensure that the birds don't have unwanted visitors - see the article below. Wasps and spiders can kill the chicks. Mites and lice can kill the chicks and infest the parent birds. Rodents can move in and soil the nest boxes. When this happens, the bluebirds will not use them.

And don't you just love being a part of the lives of so many bluebirds?

Deter the Unwanted Nest Box Tenants

Article by Christine Boran, Woolwine House Bluebird Trail, Patrick County

Like all of you, my goal is to provide Mom and Dad bluebird with a safe nest box in order to fledge more baby birds. In monitoring my nest box trails, I have found that once wasps, hornets, spiders and some bee species start to build their own nests in a nest box, the bluebirds will avoid using them. Some incubating female birds, like the chickadees and bluebirds, have been known to abandon a nest with a clutch of eggs or even hatchlings in their nests after a sudden onslaught of insect and/or spider invaders. My philosophy is DETER these unwanted nest box tenants before they cause a problem for our more desirable tenants.

Beginning in late February I apply soap - which deters wasps and spiders - to all of my nest boxes before the birds begin to occupy them .

My supplies are: a bar or two of Ivory, some clean water, a leak-proof plastic container, and a small, soft, clean pastry brush. I use the pastry brush to create the perfect consistency of a soap paste mixture that will stick to the pastry brush and then I “paint” a thin soapy film on the inside surfaces of the boxes about halfway down the from the ceiling and all over the

ceiling surface to the corners—not too thick!

Once soaped, I make sure it is dry to the touch before closing and leaving the box—it does not take long; about five minutes—then I close and secure the nest box. This helps keep any wet soap from getting on the birds' wings or tail feathers if they should enter the box immediately after I leave the area.

Female carpenter bees - which bore holes in the boxes - can also be deterred with a quick application of the pastry brush outside and underneath the nest box floor.

I keep my supplies in my car when I make my rounds of the nest boxes throughout the season. I keep extra bottled water on hand in case the soap gets dried out in my plastic container. I just add a bit more water and let it thicken to the right consistency for my pastry brush applications. I make sure the pastry brush stays flexible. Rinsing out any dried soap from the brush helps keep it soft and flexible after applications are completed.

This method works! Try it!

A New Bluebird Nest Box Trail in James City County's Freedom Park

Article by Nancy Gore, Nancy Barnhart and Ginny Carey, Trail Leaders

During the January 2012 General Membership meeting of the Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalists, Geoff Giles shared the idea of establishing a bluebird trail at James City County's Freedom Park in Williamsburg. Someone suggested this would be a good project for Cohort VI, the latest group of Master Naturalists to be trained. The idea was presented at the Cohort training meeting the following week.

As newly graduated Master Naturalists, our group was excited to have a "class project". We were anxious to learn and participate in citizen science and stay in touch with fellow classmates and friends.

This really was a team effort. Jan Lockwood, of Cohort VI and a VBS County Coordinator, played a huge role throughout the process, as did Shirley Devan, former President of the Chapter and President of the Williamsburg Bird Club. Early on, they guided the group, providing information on bluebirds and showing where to set up the boxes. They patiently answered tons of our questions.

Starting in March, we created a weekly monitoring schedule; monitoring bluebird nesting was a first for us, and we did not want to miss any of the developments, activity, and fun. Armed with the "bluebird bucket", binoculars, field guides, and cameras, we made the rounds of the trail. We never tired of finding the brilliant blue eggs of the bluebirds or the tiny eggs of the chickadees.

Freedom Park bluebird boxes came from many sources. The trail went up in a weekend. A Cohort VI work party repaired and fabricated the original 14 boxes and hardware on a Saturday, and another work party installed them on Sunday, the next day. After a short time, the five boxes in the Williamsburg Botanical Garden (located in the park) also became part of the trail.

The boxes have been remarkably successful. Freedom Park had a bluebird nest within a week of the trail going up. Of our 19 boxes, 11 eventually had bluebird eggs, three had chickadees, and one had both bluebirds and chickadees. We found our first bluebird chicks on April 12. The first round of nesting was completed and all boxes were empty by June 1. Our final nesting was over and boxes cleaned on August 16. A total of 51 bluebird chicks and 14 chickadee chicks had fledged.

Besides the thrill of watching the progression from nest to fledgling, we had an equally exciting time finding and (usually) identifying much of the flora and fauna we encountered. We are fortunate to have some outstanding photographers – Tom Dougherty, Hart Haynes, Shirley Devan, Inge Curtis – in the Cohort who captured many of our memorable moments. With our photographers leading the way, we particularly looked forward to checking the five boxes in the Ellipse Garden. In addition to our bluebird mission, we learned much from watching the seasonal progression of the native plants and wildflower meadow that, in turn, attracted hundreds of butterflies and dragonflies. We learned to spot such frequent visitors as the Common Whitetail, Common Green Darner, American Lady, Painted Lady, and Crane flies and found an abundance of dreaded ticks and chiggers.

This past fall the Cohort came together once again to do a few repairs and to add seven more boxes, bringing the trail total to 26. We chose the locations of the new boxes based on this past season's bluebird activity. The James City County Parks and Recreation administration and Freedom Park staff have been extremely helpful and supportive of our effort, and we believe it is the first park in James City County to host a bluebird trail.

Addendum: The Freedom Park Trail is the newest of eight trails now being monitored by the Historic Rivers Chapter, Virginia Master Naturalists in James City County, York County and the Cities of Newport News and Williamsburg. We recognize and appreciate the guidance and support received from the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Please click this link to enjoy a day on the Freedom Park Bluebird Trail <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etVoDyxG2ro>

We Would Like to Recognize our Endowment, Sustaining and Box Sponsor Members

THANK YOU!

Endowment Members	Sustaining Members	Box Sponsor Members
William Carmines	Marilyn & Gene Philippi	David & Karen Timer
Ayuko Kimura-Fay	Carol Caplan	Lillian Bivens
Donald Akers	Bill Talty	Karen Hulebak
Carl Hansen	Joanne Bauer	Thomas & Bonnie Wasmund
Joe Wilson	S. Miller & A. Quezon	Sandra Wilson
Cynthia & Charles Crook	Brenda McDannald	Kathleen Britts
Bruce & Susan Jones	Lynn & Joan Hamb	Carolyn Williams
Karen Hulebak	Janet Locklear	Pat Giuliani
No. Neck Audubon Society	Carmen Bishop	Susan Turner
Pam McMillie	Adrienne Stefan	Everett Millais
Donald Akers	Stavey Evers	Frank Burroughs
Ayuko Kimura-Fay	Brenda Kouyoumdjian	Stacey Evers
Joan Lane	Hampton Roads Bird Club	Christina Woodson
Phillip Kenny	Roger & Pat Temples	
Pam McMillie		
Donald Akers		

President's Message

By Carmen Bishop

Spring can be frenetically busy, singing all day long, checking out nest boxes, gathering fine grasses. It's busy for the bluebirders as well. But while we are focusing on the moment and the tasks at hand of installing and repairing boxes, and recruiting and training monitors, we have many things to plan for and look forward to. We look forward to a great year of native birds, so let's take pictures. This is something that I usually forget to do. But I hope to remember this year and then, like Henrico County coordinator Christina Woodson, I'll be able to share the story in pictures as a special thank you to monitors and others at the end of the bluebird season.

New things are on the horizon for VBS. A new website is in the works thanks to the talent and generosity of web designer, Lori Mattern. It may be up and running by the time you read this. Also, we hope to add bluebird presentations that can be downloaded from the website. In addition, we hope to launch a new Bluebird Sanctuary program. This is still a nestling idea, but the thought is that if an area has bluebird boxes, designed and monitored according to VBS protocol, and provides habitat in the way of native plants that provide berries and/or cover, it could be recognized with an official VBS Bluebird Sanctuary sign. Spring is a great time to put in native plants that will support the birds all year long and make your area a sanctuary for your bluebirds.

While I look forward to the new bluebird nesting season, it is bittersweet because every bluebird reminds me of Barbara Chambers. We have been working on several special memorials. A beautiful nest box was constructed by Paul Davis out of American Chestnut. This box was affixed with a bronze plaque and installed at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens. The Board also approved a special award in her name. The award will be presented at the fall conference, so if you have any nominations, please send them to me. We are working with artist Julie Zickefoose and Meadowlark Gardens to create a poster depicting the lifecycle of the bluebird. It will be displayed in the visitor center at Meadowlark. In addition, copies will be printed that can be distributed to schools, honoring Barb's work as a teacher and an educator and ambassador for bluebirds. The poster will be available for purchase so we can all enjoy it. Hopefully it will be completed this spring and we will have a small dedication ceremony at Meadowlark.

Thank you for your support of VBS. If you haven't yet renewed your membership, we hope you will do so, and consider a special donation to the Barbara Chambers memorial fund, or as a box sponsor or Sustaining or Endowment member.

I wish you and your bluebirds a safe and productive spring!



Photo by Lexi Meadows

Mark your Calendar

Today: Re-new your VBS membership if you haven't already.

Today: Send your data to Charlie Chambers. Data forms are available on the VBS website.

March 1: Inspect and repair your nest boxes for the upcoming bluebird season. If you are interested in monitoring a trail near you this season, contact your county coordinator (see our website).

March 2: Bluebird Monitor Training Day by Vickie Fuquay, 10:30AM, Raywood Landscape Center, Danville. For more information, 434-822-1400.

March 16: VBS Board Meeting, DGIF Headquarters, Richmond. All members are welcome. For more infor-

mation, 703-764-9268.

April 1: Time to start monitoring your nest boxes, if you have not already started.

April 2: Bluebird presentation by Earl Morris, Women's Golf Assoc., Hunting Hills Country Club, Roanoke.

April 13 – Fredericksburg Earth Day Celebration, Old Mill Park

April 20: Annual Eagle Festival, Mason Neck State Park.

June 22: Purple Martin Field Day, Louisa County, 10 am to 2 pm.

October 3-5: North American Bluebird Society Conference, Aiken SC

How To Join

Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check for \$10 for an individual with emailed Newsletter (\$15 for print Newsletter) or \$15 for a family with emailed Newsletter (\$20 for a print Newsletter) to:

Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Membership forms are available on the VBS website: www.virginiabluebirds.org



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