

The Bird Box

Spring 2014 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org

A Hearty VBS Thank You!



The Bird Box

Inside this issue:

VBS recently sent out membership renewal letters and we sincerely thank everyone who has joined, renewed or made a donation. If you haven't had a chance to send in your renewal, we look forward to hearing from you. Sustaining, Endowment and Box Sponsors will be recognized in the summer edition of the *Bird Box*.

We want to thank and recognize the following individuals and organizations for their support:

Mobil and Ken Frassa:

- Ken annually applies for a matching grant for retirees from Mobil on behalf of VBS. Ken monitors a bluebird trail and Mobil matches his gift of time with a monetary gift.

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and Stephen Living:

- Stephen has annually shepherded through a grant from DGIF for VBS which provides funds for nest boxes in urban areas.

Foundation:

- A private family foundation has provided VBS with grant funds for nestcams for schools. This year VBS has also received funds for boxes and habitat improvements at schools, such as native plant gardens that provide berries for birds, and for a summer intern to advance our data management.

Thank you all for your generosity and support of bluebird conservation!

Item	Page
A Volunteer Legacy	2
Educational Posters	2
Notes From the Trail	3
VBS Officers & Directors	4
Barely a Scratch	4
VBS 2013 Awards	5
VBS 2013 Data	6
Fledglings Avoid Predation	7
VBS Online Shop	7
Purple Martin Field Day	8
How to Join	8

A Volunteer Legacy

By Cathy Hindman

Her work lives on at Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge. She trained her team well and her dedication and utmost care of the bluebird trail speak highly of her.

Ticks are a big problem when checking the boxes, so she rounded up a volunteer to cut the tall grasses around each pole. The trail is rewarding with twenty very active boxes and plans for two more.

Kathy Gaarde started monitoring this trail in the spring of 2009. Kathy and I shared the VBS table at the Fall Festival, and enjoyed working with the children who would ask questions and learn about the bluebird activity by the Occoquan River and Belmont Bay in Prince William County.

Kathy's life was cut short by a shooter at the Navy Yard on September 16, 2013. As I made phone calls checking on two other friends at the military base, I sadly recognized Kathy's name on the news listing. In December I went out to the trail with the other volunteers whom Kathy just trained and we checked each box location for any repair needs. I saw Kathy's training shining through as though she wrote the protocols herself.

VBS is proud to have been served by Kathy Gaarde. We will miss her greatly.



Educational Posters

VBS has educational posters available in memory of Barbara Chambers, a founding member. The posters are 24" X 28" and are in full color depicting the life cycle of a bluebird, their choice foods and a proper nesting box painted by artist Julie Zickefoose.

There is a framed poster in the visitor center of Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA and copies are for sale in the gift shop.

VBS will distribute a poster free of charge to a teacher for use in the classroom or for a visitor center at a park.

We request a \$10 donation for posters for personal use. Please contact Anne Little , TheGate@cox.net or 540-207-4298.



Notes from the Trail

By Christina Woodson

“To have a better understanding of life, to be a better conservationist, scientist, citizen-or even a better person-go outside and connect with nature. Who knows, maybe a lucky bluebird will brighten your day.”

Sarah Vincent, an intern with a Northern Virginia natural resource agency, wrote these words after spending her first summer monitoring a bluebird trail in Fairfax County. Nest box trail monitors certainly have a most unique and intimate look at the reproductive cycle of a wild creature, and whether they are out on the trail for the first time or the hundredth, opening a box to find the beginning of a new nest, or some fresh eggs is always a special event. Thanks to these Richmond and Henrico County trail monitors for sharing some of their impressions after their first season “out on the trail!”



“It was really amazing that the trail truly brought bluebirds to our park. The youth group and I had not realized that bluebirds made a particular type of nest that we could identify. My favorite memory was watching several 13 year old boy monitors say ‘aww’ when we first saw a set of newly hatched birds. We were all really moved by this incredible experience.”

Laura, Forest Hill Park

“It’s a great project for increasing and strengthening the population of a formerly endangered species. I have learned a lot about the decline of the Eastern Bluebird and subsequent restoration efforts. A favorite memory would be watching a flock of five to ten bluebirds flying together a few feet away from me at the trail.”

David, Deep Run Park

“It is encouraging to interact with other people in our community who enjoy nature in our local park. Since I knew nothing about these birds, I really learned a lot. I learned that bluebirds are not ‘blue’! I was amazed to open a box and find an entire new nest the week after removing the old one. Those bluebirds are industrious!”

Vivienne, Forest Hill Park

“Bluebirds have great ‘family values’: the parents are hard-working, dedicated, committed to each other and

their families, frugal when necessary, generous when food is abundant, and they obviously spend a lot of their time together building great families and relationships-we should appreciate their values every time we see them!”

Jim, Bryan Park



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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!

E-mail your materials to Doug Rogers.

June 24, 2013, started out like any other American Kestrel nest box monitoring day. I, along with Joe Palzkill and Judy Schwarzmeier (federally licensed banders), monitor 27 kestrel nest boxes for Beaver Creek Reserve in Fall Creek, Wisconsin. Jill Barland, our silent auction winner, was with us.

It was a beautiful warm day, and upon our arrival at Box 20, we expected to find 4 juvenile kestrels inside the nest box, which we were prepared to band. We had quite a shock! As we drove up, there was no nest box on the 10-foot pole. Our truck went deadly silent inside. We looked at each other and said, "Oh no."

We jumped out of the truck and began searching the area for the nest box. We found the nest box broken and scattered in pieces on the ground beneath the pole. Just then, the farmer who had given us permission to place the box on his farmland drove past. I ran to the farmer and asked, "Have you seen a bear on your property?" He replied, "Yes. A rather large bear has been seen in the area." We were fairly certain that a bear had ransacked our kestrel nest box.

We quickly began surveying the area under the nest box. To our surprise, on the ground hidden in the tall grass were the four juvenile kestrels! We assessed they had been on the ground for several days due to the amount of fecal matter and pellets. They remained quiet until Joe pushed the tall grass away from where they were huddled together. Once they were spotted, they became very noisy.

Judy began the process of aging, sexing, and banding the juvenile kestrels with Jill aiding her. Joe and I used the two ladders we carry in the truck and began repairing the nest box. We used multiple bungee cords and used the old screws to reattach the nest box on the pole. We then placed the four juveniles into the nest box, while the adult female kestrel flew overhead. Later that evening, we returned to the nest box to check that our repair work was holding up.

The adult pair was flying to the nest box and dropping prey into the entrance hole. The parents continued to feed the young, and the four juvenile kestrels fledged successfully. At the end of the season, the old box was taken down, and a new box was installed. It was a happy ending to an exciting adventure for us all and an important reminder why we monitor our kestrel nest boxes so diligently.



It's a heart-wrenching sight, finding a box on the ground in ruins. But with quick thinking, Alice Droske saved four American Kestrel nestlings that were thrown from their nest in the chaos of a bear attack. Photo by Alice Droske.

VBS Awards Ceremony – November 2013

By Christine Boran, State Coordinator

The Awards Committee consisted of myself, Lexi Meadows, Christina Woodson, and Cathy Hindman. We received many nominations—we carefully reviewed them all, only wishing everyone could be recipients in the four categories. We thank everyone for submitting nominations of select, hard-working volunteers recognizing those who give their all for the birds. The following highlights each award recipient as presented on November 9, 2013. Congratulations to all awardees for an outstanding job! Your service to VBS is truly appreciated. The awards were personally signed artwork prints from Linda Bowman, titled “Open Wide,” and from Joe Hautman, “Summer Morning.”



Dale and Linda Kerns – Heritage

The Heritage Award recognizes an individual who has been a long-time bluebird, who lives and breathes blue-

birds and has spent many years promoting the love of bluebirds, who conducts consistent outreach to the public with longstanding service on the trails and education to others, always looking to do something extra. This really is a team of two! Members of VBS since June 1999, they deserve the VBS Heritage Award for all they are doing as VBS Coordinators for Grayson and Carroll Counties and beyond.



Margaret Wester – Blue-birder of the Year

This award is given to an individual who promotes blue-

birds through outreach to schools and community groups, exemplifying good management techniques and helping others love and care for the bluebird. An impressively large bluebird trail was established around three years ago and has been stewarded at every stage by Margaret. She has been “the heart and working hands” of the project. According to one supporter; “Regardless of the time or day, she will venture out to the remotest parts of the park to check on a box”. Another notes that she is “Always willing to help answer questions on any environmental topic, and her responses are always kind, prompt and very thorough.”



Doug Rogers - Volunteer of the Year

This award recognizes an individual who helps promote and enhance the Virginia Bluebird Society by giving his time and energy. He helped VBS and the bluebird grow and flourish in Virginia, has monitored bluebird boxes for five years and has established his own trail with 12 boxes. He is actively involved in the Monticello Bird Club. He is hard working behind the scenes. His nuts and bolts work as editor of the Newsletter is much appreciated. He is also Coordinator of New and Refurbished grant applications for maintenance of trails that are in need of new boxes and the establishment of new trails.



Vickie Fuquay - Barbara Chambers Memorial County Coordinator of the Year

This award is given in memory of Barbara Chambers, one of the founders of the Virginia Bluebird Society. This year’s recipient is all a county coordinator should be. She is available for her monitors, a phone call away when problems arise. She always finds a solution or has a suggestion to help. She has personally taken over the trails of others when monitors weren’t able to complete the season. She joined VBS in 2007 and quickly encouraged others from her area to become members. This resulted in over 50 new memberships.

2013 Virginia Bluebird Society State Statistics

County	Trail Leader/County Coordinator	Number of Tails	Number of Boxes	Bluebirds			Chickadees			Tree Swallows			House Wrens			Other			All								
				Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched	Nest Attempts	Eggs	Hatched						
Albemarle	Dunn, A.	39	477	830	2,745	2,360	2,276	38	185	173	159	107	521	457	431	4	35	35	8	34	30	30	787	3,520	3,055	2,931	
Arlington	Davis-Holland, A.	3	11	2	8	8	3	4	10	6	5	-	-	-	-	14	71	62	57	-	-	-	20	98	76	65	
Augusta	King, J.	1	28	20	86	66	63	1	6	6	6	17	81	75	70	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	173	147	138	
Botetourt	Evans, T.	8	261	140	597	513	493	9	45	32	32	160	876	783	761	15	72	65	65	34	-	-	368	1,590	1,393	1,351	
Buchanan	Marshall, R.	3	65	44	193	173	168	-	-	-	-	12	58	49	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	56	251	222	213	
Charlottesville	Lambert, B.	1	5	2	9	7	7	1	3	-	-	1	4	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	16	11	11	
Christiansburg	Heiler, J. & L.	3	65	69	268	272	271	6	30	20	20	7	38	36	30	-	-	-	-	2	6	5	5	84	372	342	335
Clarke	Lichter, K.	1	110	68	252	241	236	-	-	-	-	93	487	391	370	30	173	152	149	-	-	-	191	942	784	755	
Culpeper	Kitts, S.	2	12	16	65	59	54	-	-	-	-	11	46	45	39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27	111	104	93	
Fairfax	Bishop, C.	57	694	621	2,728	2,310	2,217	63	272	188	181	234	1,133	948	881	88	415	345	335	12	63	55	55	1,018	4,611	3,845	3,635
Fauquier	Dennis, B.	5	79	77	329	287	284	-	-	-	-	32	184	141	141	-	-	-	-	7	41	10	10	116	534	438	435
Floyd	Boran, C.	3	12	18	64	52	46	-	-	-	-	5	20	15	15	3	12	10	10	-	-	-	26	96	77	71	
Fluvanna	Tyler, F.	2	9	8	33	33	33	-	-	-	-	5	17	15	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	50	48	48	
Fredericksburg City	Lillis, A.	3	20	28	70	49	35	2	10	7	7	7	8	7	7	-	-	-	-	3	9	5	5	37	101	69	54
Giles	Opengart, B.	2	17	12	37	31	28	2	7	4	4	10	46	33	28	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	90	68	60	
Gloucester	Walker, B.	3	15	10	40	32	32	2	11	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	51	37	37	
Grovespring	Kenna, D. & L.	3	25	26	105	87	78	-	-	-	-	7	38	30	28	4	23	22	21	-	-	-	37	166	130	127	
Greene	Wilczak, P. & F.	2	40	48	197	190	189	4	22	16	16	10	53	49	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	62	272	255	248	
Halifax	Fuquay, V.	5	65	67	309	275	267	2	10	10	10	9	45	37	37	2	8	5	4	-	-	-	80	372	327	318	
Harrisonburg	Woodson, C.	4	55	66	192	171	171	13	61	51	50	-	-	-	-	3	11	4	5	2	9	9	84	273	235	235	
Henry	Haley, D.	13	228	350	1,472	1,318	1,270	2	10	10	10	7	29	26	25	1	4	4	4	-	-	-	360	1,515	1,358	1,309	
James City	Lockwood & Ulmar	6	148	121	516	429	399	13	73	65	64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	64	53	51	148	653	547	504
Lancaster	Bourdy, P.	1	21	31	127	119	107	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	16	10	10	1	6	6	36	149	135	123	
Loudoun	Locklear, J.	34	407	384	1,648	1,400	1,330	14	60	44	31	188	907	775	736	75	318	272	264	54	80	-	713	3,013	2,491	2,381	
Louisiana	Tyler, F.	2	9	4	19	18	18	2	4	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	23	21	21	
Madison	Squires, D.	4	47	36	171	150	138	6	40	34	30	12	61	52	52	-	-	-	-	12	49	48	66	321	282	266	
Montgomery	Opengart, B.	2	28	26	102	91	86	-	-	-	-	19	74	58	55	3	6	6	6	-	-	-	48	182	155	147	
Nelson	Davis, P.	13	148	158	732	643	618	2	10	10	10	35	181	156	136	1	4	4	4	-	-	-	196	927	823	788	
Northumberland	Adams, L. & D.	1	10	22	89	70	70	3	5	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25	94	75	75	
Orange	McMillie, P.	3	44	30	141	138	132	6	34	32	28	12	61	59	54	3	13	9	9	24	69	2	75	318	240	225	
Patriot	Boran, C.	2	39	54	251	184	176	4	19	8	8	1	5	3	3	2	11	6	6	3	9	-	64	295	201	193	
Pittsylvania	Fuquay, V.	131	628	779	3,418	3,024	2,937	41	206	191	188	86	416	333	318	38	200	194	187	5	24	20	20	949	4,264	3,782	3,648
Powhatan	Witt, T.	1	7	6	23	21	21	2	13	6	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	4	4	
Prince William	Swanson-Hindman	10	162	168	752	645	628	10	52	52	52	38	164	154	145	11	58	54	54	9	23	-	232	1,059	905	879	
Rappahannock	Patterson, B.	5	57	53	224	196	170	9	54	49	45	4	22	20	20	4	21	11	11	3	10	10	73	331	286	256	
Richmond	Nikrozy, P.	5	64	41	185	173	165	12	29	29	29	2	9	9	9	5	14	13	13	4	2	-	64	239	224	216	
Richmond City	Woodson, C.	4	30	27	122	122	112	8	29	29	29	2	9	9	9	5	14	14	14	3	-	-	45	174	174	164	
Roanoke	Morris, E.	15	298	349	1,525	1,295	1,238	19	94	71	65	94	400	346	335	26	131	100	96	5	18	16	493	2,168	1,828	1,750	
Rockbridge	Kuech, S.	5	73	64	272	244	219	8	47	43	39	20	104	85	84	2	10	3	3	1	4	4	65	437	379	349	
Rockingham	Kahler, C.	1	22	10	43	42	37	1	7	7	7	2	9	9	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	5	5	5	
Stafford	Finneyan, D.	3	50	72	294	216	214	9	39	32	32	4	19	16	16	11	59	58	48	10	41	37	106	452	359	347	
Stafford	Little, A.	3	16	15	81	77	77	-	-	-	-	5	21	21	21	-	-	-	-	2	10	10	23	112	108	108	
Warren	Swanson, B.	2	78	91	369	269	267	3	18	-	-	32	161	121	106	5	21	20	19	-	-	-	131	599	440	412	
Westmoreland	Namney, P.	2	70	105	423	389	380	-	-	-	-	1	5	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	106	428	394	385	
York	Lockwood-Ulmar	2	60	69	291	244	227	6	32	13	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	4	76	327	261	244	
TOTALS		420	4,802	5,036	21,717	18,763	17,807	327	1,556	1,258	1,168	1,284	6,296	5,384	5,067	361	1,720	1,478	1,429	221	584	331	329	7,229	31,873	27,214	25,800

Placing Nest Boxes Close to Forest Cover Seems to Help Bluebird Fledglings Avoid Hawk Predation

By Allyson Jackson (now a PhD student in the Fisheries and Wildlife Department at Oregon State University,
email Allyson.jackson@oregonstate.edu)

Read the full research article published in Urban Ecosystems Vol 16, No. 2. "Habitat near nest boxes correlated with fate of eastern bluebird fledglings in an urban landscape" by Allyson Jackson, Joshua Froneberger, and Daniel Cristol. Research was conducted while Allyson was a master's student in the Biology Department at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

My master's research in Williamsburg involved tracking bluebird fledglings using radio-transmitters from the time they fledged until they were about 40 days old and independent from their parents. Although I started the project to look at the difference between fragmented golf course habitat and more natural, park habitat, I quickly realized that some "natural" parks had a lot of fragmented habitat that mimicked golf courses, and some golf courses were very wooded and more park-like. Working with an undergraduate field assistant (Josh Froneberger), we instead decided to look closely at the habitat around the nest box to see if this influenced fledgling survival. Although studies have shown that habitat around natural nests influences fledging survival, this relationship has not been examined for artificial nest cavities.

Although we commonly monitor bluebird reproductive success based on whether the nest survives to fledge, my research showed that many fledgling birds succumb to hawk predation within the first few days after fledging, probably because they aren't yet strong fliers. You probably already know that bluebird fledglings aren't the bright blue colors that their parents are, in part to allow them to blend into their surroundings and avoid predation. If you have ever watched a recently fledged bluebird, they aren't entirely mobile, and spend a large part of their day hopping around in trees or shrubs and begging for food from their parents.

We thought we might be seeing higher predation in areas where it was harder for fledglings to find vegetative cover to camouflage themselves in those first few days after fledging. Like I said before, this was no longer a golf course or park question, we instead looked at each box as an independent unit. We compared vegetation surrounding nest boxes that produced eastern bluebird fledglings that were predated by hawks within 10 days of leaving the nest to vegetation surrounding nest boxes producing surviving fledglings. Because many habitat variables are correlated, we had to use a principle components statistical analysis to understand how these different factors were correlated with survival. We found a significant difference between PC scores for forest denseness around nest boxes that produced surviving versus predated fledglings, meaning that fledglings that survived tended to come from nest boxes with high forest and canopy cover, close trees and little grass. From a management perspective, this means that you may be putting fledglings at a disadvantage if you place nest boxes far from wooded edges on your property. Although some fledglings may be able to make it to cover without encountering a hawk, the probability of predation increases as boxes are placed in more open areas.

Worthy of Note - VBS Online Shop

Great news - This Spring we'll be adding new VBS products to the shop and your photos could be part of it! So please send them to Helaine Krob at hmkrob@gmail.com. You'll receive credit for your photos and our gratitude (but not payment.) You can access the shop through the VBS website, www.virginiabluebirds.org.

Mark your Calendar

20th Annual Purple Martin Field Day, June 21, 2014

If you find bluebirds fascinating, you will love seeing this strategically built Purple Martin colony in action! You'll meet experienced birders at this **FREE** event, hear informative lectures, receive free educational literature, and learn what creates a successful colony of Purple Martins and why we need to provide housing and care for them. Learn features of ideal and safe housing, the best place to locate housing, how to attract martins, and why predator guards are necessary to insure the breeding success of a colony so the birds will return from Brazil to YOUR yard, bringing you joy, year after year. **Louisa County** (between Charlottesville and Richmond)

Watch 130 pairs of martins soaring and feeding their nestlings while you learn about martins!



Main presentation begins at 10:00 a.m. (please arrive before that time), and ends by 2:00 p.m.

For more information, contact (434) 962-8232 or kingston@cstone.net

Check out this website for more info., directions, what to bring (and not to bring!), and more!

<http://www.purplemartinfieldday.org/>



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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