

The Bird Box Bird Box

Spring 2021 Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society www.virginiabluebirds.org

Virginia Bluebird Society Biennial Conference

UPDATE: Conference postponed due to pandemic. Look for details in future issues of *The Birdbox* and at www.virginiabluebirds.org.

Chaired by Anne Little, VBS Co-founder and Past President, the conference committee has begun planning in earnest for our November 12 -13 conference. Plans are underway to hold the conference in northern Virginia, where VBS was founded in 1996. In celebration of VBS' 25th Anniversary, we are truly excited to announce Julie Zickefoose as keynote speaker. Julie is a well-known writer, artist, and naturalist hailing from Ohio, whose latest book, *Saving Jemima: Life and Love with a Hard-luck Jay*, was published in 2019. Julie was the keynote speaker at our October 2004 biennial meeting, thus is no stranger to Virginia Bluebird Society members. If it's your first time or you've attended the biennial meeting before, you won't want to miss this return presentation.

Helpers at the Nest

By Gretchen Gehrett, Albemarle County

Watching a human youngster eagerly attempting to help parents is heart-warming and often amusing when the child is flummoxed in the process. So too with fledgling bluebirds trying to feed their younger siblings.

The fledglings were eight weeks from having emerged from the nest box themselves. Their mother was not one to quickly build a new nest and move on to her next brood. This mother was dedicated to seeing her first brood of the year have a good start in life by diligently feeding the young bluebirds and staying together as a family until she felt comfortable that they were competent in fending for themselves.

Although the adult male made it abundantly known, with increasingly loud and insistent vocalizations, that he wanted nest building to start NOW, the adult female was having none of it. Oh, yes, from time to time she would placate him by looking in the nest box and even going inside, but it was quite

clear she was not going to start a nest until her little ones were demonstrably self-sufficient.

That is how the nestlings came to have siblings old enough to believe they could help bring food to their newly hatched siblings. But there was one problem—how to get through the Noel guard.

The fledglings watched as their parents went in and out of the nest box opening surrounded by the Noel guard hundreds of times with food in their beaks. First they watched from nearby trees. Then they watched from the roof of the nest box. And then they, too, arrived at the nest box with insects in their beaks, eager to help.

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A fledgling with food waits for a chance to help feed siblings.
Photo by Gretchen Gehrett



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Helpers at the Nest, Continued from page 1 They inched their way from the roof to the sides of the nest box. They knew there were hatchlings inside. They could see them through the crack between the front and side panel. They could hear their chatter. They knew they were hungry. They were so close.

The young bluebirds could see the nest box opening through the Noel guard, and the hungry nestlings were in there. But every time they tried to move from the side of the nest box through the wire of the Noel guard, they couldn't get through. These little ones persevered for days with insects in their beaks, endlessly searching for a way to get through the wire mesh, but, alas, every attempt was thwarted.

And then, one afternoon the mother entered the nest box to feed the nestlings while a fledgling, with an insect in its beak, was on the side of the Noel guard trying to get through the wire mesh. The mother emerged from the nest box, turned to the young bluebird, who offered the insect through the wire mesh. The mother accepted the insect in her beak, and took it to the nestlings inside. Success!

A short time later, the father flew into the nest box with food while a fledgling helper with an insect was on the top of the Noel guard. The father emerged, reached his beak up to the youngster, took the insect and then—he ate it himself! For nineteen years I have been honored to have bluebird neighbors in our backyard, and have been enchanted by their gentle grace, welcoming wing-waves, and family sagas. This is the first time I have seen fledglings attempt to help their parents feed their younger siblings in the nest.



*John Murphy with a completed Noel guard
Right: John shows the tools used in his project
Photos by Kristen Murphy*

Boy Scout Project Benefits Bluebirds

By Valerie Gaffney, VBS President

For John Murphy, and for the Virginia Bluebird Society, COVID-19 produced at least one positive result. Rather, make that thirteen positive results. John is a sixteen-year-old Boy Scout from Troop 1717 in Hartwood, Virginia, as well as a sophomore at Stafford High School.

Working toward his Life rank, the last one before Eagle, John was seeking a troop service project he could complete while complying with social distancing and BSA requirements. Enlisting the help of his mother, Kristen Murphy, John in late October contacted the Virginia Bluebird Society. Was

there any trail work he could undertake? By that time, most if not all of the VBS Bluebird trails were pretty much closed down for the season. But how about making cat/raccoon guards? VBS can always use more cat/raccoon guards.

Following an email exchange that included sending John plans for the guards, he agreed to take on this project. In early November, the wire mesh and rabbit cage clips along with a guard pattern were delivered to his home. For anyone who has worked with steel mesh, cutting and bending and clipping it together, this was no easy undertaking. Yet in early January, John delivered the last of thirteen guards he cut and assembled for the Society.

Nice work, John! And from VBS and our blues, a big thank you! Best of luck achieving your Eagle ranking.

Three Young Men and Their January 19th Day of Service

By Valerie Gaffney, VBS President

A mother's search for ways to help the world while quarantined at home during the COVID-19 pandemic led Tammy Duncan of Alexandria, VA to the Virginia Bluebird Society website. Tammy discovered and downloaded plans for the Carl Little nest box and then waited. Soon enough, sons Casey and Caden, along with friend Matthew Eggert, all students at Commonwealth Academy in Alexandria, were searching for a community service project as part of their school's January 19th Day of Service. The boys' criteria: build something, help the environment, and be able to do it outdoors. Tammy's response was to pull out the nest box plans, and the boys were all in. With a little help from Dad, Matthew and Caden, Life Scouts within BSA troops 1509 and 996, and Casey, a Petty Officer in the US Navy Sea Cadet Corps, built and recently delivered five nest boxes.



Left: Curtis Duncan (Dad) and Caden Duncan using the Carl Little nest box plans.

Center: Caden Duncan, Curtis Duncan, Casey Duncan, and Mathew Eggert beginning the building process

Right: Casey Duncan, Mathew Eggert, and Caden Duncan assemble boxes.

Photos by Tammy Duncan.

Virginia Bluebird Society Nest Box Activity 2020

By Ann D. Dunn, Virginia Bluebird Society Data Manager

Despite the chaos and grief of the past year our busy cavity nesters carried on as usual and managed to come up with a productive breeding season. For those of us fortunate to monitor their progress, they provided a much-needed sense of normalcy. Unfortunately, because of COVID-19 related closures, we do not have records for some of our trails this year. Trail numbers for 2020 at 432 were down from 2019 by 2.5 percent; boxes monitored at 4766 were down by 6.4 percent. A summary of results is shown in the table on the following page.

This year, 23,667 cavity nesters fledged from our monitored boxes. By species distribution they were: 73% Eastern Bluebird, 19% Tree Swallow, 5% House Wren and 2% Carolina Chickadee. The bluebird season got off to an early start with a county average “First Egg” date of March 25, the earliest in the past five years. The average county “Last Fledging Date” was August 18, within the average of the past five years, giving a duration of 146 days (86 % of counties reporting).

Seasonal Nest Box Usage by bluebirds (measured as Nesting Attempts/box) at 1.1, continued to increase since its nadir year of 2015, while that of tree swallows remained fairly steady at 0.3 (Figure 1).

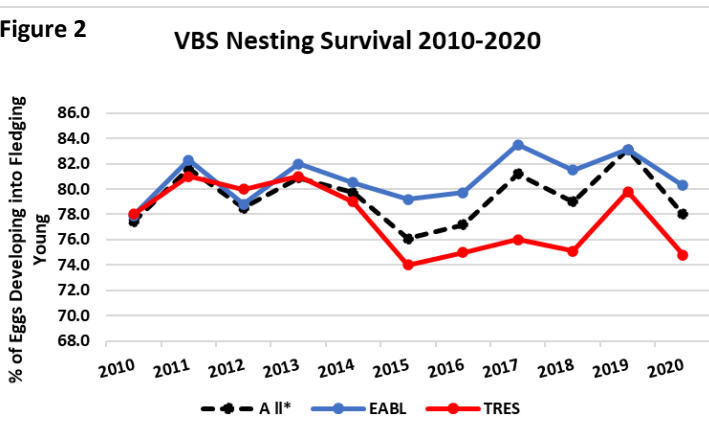
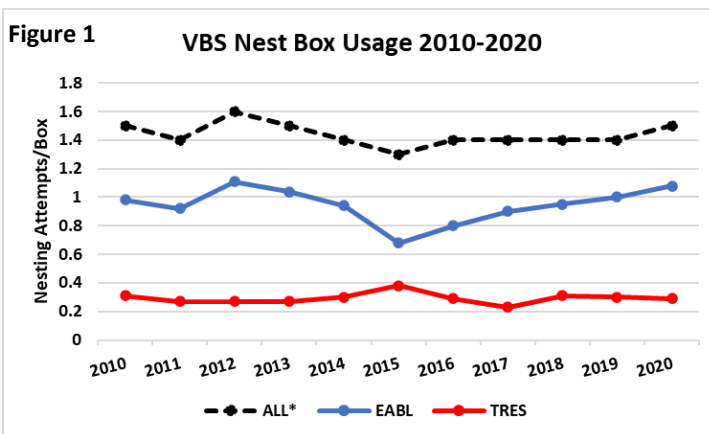
Nesting Survival (measured as percentage of eggs developing into fledging young) for both bluebirds and tree swallows dropped somewhat from last year. Bluebirds were three percentage points lower than 2019 but at 80% remained close to an eleven-year average of 81%. Tree Swallows did not fare as well, experiencing a five percentage point drop from a high seen the previous year, and were three percentage points below their eleven-year average (Figure 2).

Despite reduced survival rates, overall nest box productivity (fledglings/box) for bluebirds increased to 3.5 from 3.2, last year’s figure and an 11-year average. Nest box productivity for Tree Swallows fell to 1.0 after a high of 1.3 the preceding year, slightly below the 11-year average of 1.1.

The weather, always a major factor in nesting productivity, was certainly in play this past season. We had several significant cold spells (sequential days with temperatures in the 30’s) in both April and May, and these were followed by an extended heatwave in July. Each of these periods would have caused reduced viability of eggs and hatchlings in the nest and a limitation of food supplies for parents attempting to feed them.

Thanks to all our dedicated monitors who contributed to this report. As always, we look forward to the season to come and this year particularly, to welcoming the reopening of those trails closed to us by the pandemic in 2020.

Data Table on page 4



26th Annual Purple Martin Field Day

Date: Saturday, June 26, 2021

Time: Presentations begin at 11:00 a.m. Events end at 3:00 p.m.

Location: A private farm in Louisa County, VA (central VA, about 60 miles NW of Richmond)

How do you attract Purple Martins? At this event on the farm of Mrs. Merle Wood and her son, Purple Martin expert Lance Wood, you will learn the habitat martins require, and how to protect birds from predators. You’ll see a spectacular martin colony that has grown from 4 martin pairs in 1992 to more than 100 pairs! Buy gourd seeds and learn to modify them to create Purple Martin homes. Come and join the fun!

No registration. Event is FREE, but donations are appreciated to help cover expenses.

Bring lawn chairs, shoes for wet grass, binoculars, notepad, bag lunch/drink, and camera. No pets, please.

DIRECTIONS, PHOTOS & MORE INFORMATION: www.purplemartinfieldday.org

Questions? Call Kathy Laine at (434) 222-1831 and leave your name and phone number.



Participants view Purple Martin supercolony
Photo by Kathy Laine

Virginia Bluebird Society Nest Box Activity 2020

| ID | County | Trail Leader/County Coordinator | Number of trails | Number of Boxes | Bluebirds | | | | Chickadees | | | | Tree Swallows | | | | House Wrens | | | | Other | | | | All | | | | | | |
|----|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|------|---------|------------|---------------|-------|---------|---------|---------------|------|---------|---------|---------------|------|---------|---------|---------------|------|---------|---------|---------------|------|---------|---------|-----------------------|-------|-----|
| | | | | | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | BB Fledged | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | Fledged | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | Fledged | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | Fledged | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | Fledged | Nest Attempts | Eggs | Hatched | Fledged | Birds Fledged Per Box | | |
| 1 | Albemarle | Dunn, A. | 35 | 365 | 417 | 1708 | 1347 | 1236 | 11 | 46 | 37 | 23 | 125 | 572 | 424 | 378 | 11 | 46 | 36 | 32 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 565 | 2376 | 1848 | 1673 | 4.6 | | |
| 2 | Bedford | | 3 | 36 | 45 | 196 | 169 | 161 | 3 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 9 | 43 | 38 | 34 | | | | | | | | | 57 | 256 | 224 | 212 | 5.9 | | |
| 3 | Buchanan | Mayhorn, R. | 3 | 62 | 63 | 270 | 245 | 213 | 2 | 14 | 11 | 10 | 18 | 85 | 78 | 69 | | | | | | | | | 83 | 369 | 334 | 292 | 4.7 | | |
| 4 | Chesterfield | Kejller, T. | 2 | 68 | 74 | 318 | 282 | 269 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 15 | 15 | 9 | | | | | | | | | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4.2 | | |
| 5 | Culpeper | Dennee, B. | 5 | 41 | 47 | 127 | 110 | 103 | | | | | 35 | 154 | 109 | 102 | | | | | | | | | 4 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 5.0 | | |
| 6 | Fairfax | Johnson, S. | 58 | 716 | 512 | 2086 | 1739 | 1664 | 36 | 70 | 52 | 52 | 297 | 1299 | 1070 | 1038 | 95 | 406 | 333 | 319 | 77 | 186 | 60 | 58 | 1017 | 4047 | 3254 | 3131 | 4.4 | | |
| 7 | Fauquier | Dennee, B. | 3 | 144 | 95 | 387 | 286 | 278 | 1 | | | | 7 | 32 | 27 | 19 | 4 | 21 | 21 | 21 | | | | | 40 | 184 | 165 | 146 | 5.4 | | |
| 8 | Floyd | Boran, C. | 3 | 27 | 29 | 131 | 117 | 106 | | | | | 28 | 134 | 105 | 94 | | | | | | | | | 93 | 410 | 342 | 317 | 5.2 | | |
| 9 | Fluvanna | Dunn, A. | 2 | 61 | 65 | 276 | 237 | 223 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 11 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 0.8 | | |
| 10 | Frederick | Batches, T. | 1 | 6 | 11 | 18 | 11 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 19 | 79 | 64 | 58 | 2.8 | | |
| 11 | Franklin | Boran, C. | 2 | 21 | 17 | 68 | 53 | 53 | 2 | 11 | 11 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | 8 | 41 | 41 | 41 | 5.1 | | |
| 12 | Gloucester | Walker, W. | 1 | 8 | 6 | 29 | 29 | 29 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 17 | 75 | 69 | 64 | 7.1 | | |
| 13 | Goochland | Rubis, J/C/Evans | 1 | 9 | 8 | 35 | 35 | 35 | | | | | 8 | 36 | 30 | 28 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | | | | | 116 | 483 | 456 | 430 | 6.0 | | |
| 14 | Greene | Wilczek, P. | 4 | 72 | 96 | 387 | 364 | 349 | | | | | 20 | 96 | 92 | 81 | | | | | | | | | 67 | 264 | 227 | 215 | 4.2 | | |
| 15 | Henrico | | 4 | 51 | 58 | 233 | 205 | 204 | 4 | 22 | 22 | 11 | | | | | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 | | | | | 409 | 1718 | 1691 | 1660 | 6.9 | | |
| 16 | Henry | Haley, D. | 8 | 241 | 405 | 1700 | 1673 | 1642 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 44 | 214 | 183 | 142 | 4.3 | | |
| 17 | Highland | Bell, S. | 3 | 33 | 23 | 100 | 76 | 47 | | | | | 17 | 87 | 87 | 80 | 4 | 27 | 20 | 15 | | | | | 44 | 214 | 183 | 142 | 4.3 | | |
| 18 | Isle of Wright | Langdon, L. | 6 | 92 | 149 | 663 | 545 | 509 | 4 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 15 | 71 | 59 | 55 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 172 | 770 | 635 | 595 | 6.5 | | |
| 19 | James City | Reitz/Jacobson/Jones | 8 | 155 | 271 | 605 | 500 | 467 | 6 | 27 | 26 | 20 | 8 | 31 | 28 | 28 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 293 | 702 | 593 | 554 | 3.6 | | |
| 20 | King George | Settle, A. | 3 | 30 | 39 | 153 | 108 | 83 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | 40 | 181 | 130 | 105 | 3.5 | | |
| 21 | Lancaster | Bouandy, P. | 2 | 56 | 67 | 288 | 254 | 224 | 2 | 10 | 10 | 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | 69 | 298 | 264 | 234 | 4.2 | | |
| 22 | Loudoun | McKew, L. | 34 | 399 | 256 | 1090 | 935 | 877 | 9 | 57 | 54 | 47 | 199 | 861 | 770 | 728 | 78 | 310 | 262 | 258 | 2 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 544 | 2329 | 2032 | 1921 | 4.8 | | |
| 23 | Madison | J. Dalley/D Lyon | 2 | 22 | 32 | 136 | 118 | 116 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 14 | 14 | 14 | | | | | | | | | 41 | 156 | 138 | 136 | 6.2 | | |
| 24 | Mathews Co | Haze, M | 1 | 4 | 3 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | | | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | | | | | 5 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 7.5 | | |
| 25 | Montgomery | Weber, S. | 6 | 90 | 62 | 245 | 179 | 143 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 79 | 315 | 196 | 140 | 19 | 91 | 73 | 68 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 161 | 657 | 454 | 351 | 3.9 | | |
| 26 | Neilson Co | Muccio, M | 10 | 118 | 128 | 480 | 414 | 378 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 32 | 138 | 109 | 101 | 9 | 27 | 19 | 19 | 7 | 14 | 9 | 9 | 179 | 669 | 555 | 511 | 4.3 | | |
| 27 | Northumberland | Adams, L. | 4 | 34 | 65 | 261 | 228 | 226 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 65 | 261 | 228 | 226 | 6.6 | | |
| 28 | Orange | Browning, C. | 4 | 38 | 62 | 234 | 187 | 184 | 3 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 8 | | | | | 70 | 262 | 211 | 205 | 5.4 | | |
| 29 | Patrick | Boran, C. | 3 | 63 | 107 | 472 | 419 | 390 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 34 | 27 | 27 | 3 | 18 | 16 | 16 | | | | | 119 | 529 | 467 | 433 | 6.9 | | |
| 30 | Pittsylvania | Fuquay, V. | 136 | 638 | 847 | 3776 | 3376 | 3259 | 39 | 215 | 195 | 190 | 144 | 695 | 544 | 465 | 22 | 115 | 109 | 104 | 7 | 35 | 32 | 29 | 1059 | 4836 | 4256 | 4047 | 6.3 | | |
| 31 | Powhatan | Witt, T. | 3 | 28 | 38 | 165 | 144 | 143 | 3 | 19 | 14 | 13 | 5 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 4 | | | | | 48 | 216 | 190 | 184 | 6.6 | | |
| 32 | Pulaski | B. Opengari | 1 | 12 | 17 | 60 | 39 | 27 | | | | | 5 | 21 | 18 | 11 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 4 | | | | | 23 | 87 | 61 | 42 | 3.5 | | |
| 33 | Prince William | Valerie Gaffney | 18 | 244 | 204 | 865 | 714 | 668 | 5 | 27 | 19 | 19 | 70 | 361 | 310 | 284 | 17 | 51 | 33 | 36 | 6 | 21 | 16 | 16 | 302 | 1325 | 1092 | 1023 | 4.2 | | |
| 34 | Rappahannock | Patterson, B. | 11 | 110 | 100 | 421 | 348 | 301 | 3 | 17 | 11 | 6 | 13 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 3 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 5 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 124 | 527 | 442 | 389 | 3.5 | | |
| 35 | Richmond City | | 5 | 58 | 62 | 258 | 241 | 231 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 62 | 258 | 241 | 231 | 4.0 | | |
| 36 | Rockbridge Co | Bernstein, B. | 2 | 26 | 12 | 47 | 39 | 30 | 8 | 12 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 15 | 83 | 59 | 44 | 2 | 12 | 6 | 6 | 39 | 161 | 113 | 84 | 3.2 | | |
| 37 | Roanoke | Whiteside/Logan/Repass | 6 | 122 | 180 | 869 | 675 | 659 | 4 | 25 | 24 | 24 | 23 | 110 | 83 | 77 | 8 | 49 | 49 | 42 | | | | | 215 | 1053 | 831 | 802 | 6.6 | | |
| 38 | Spotsylvania | Stonham, C. | 1 | 3 | 5 | 25 | 24 | 19 | | | | | 2 | 7 | 7 | 7 | | | | | | | | | 7 | 32 | 31 | 26 | 8.7 | | |
| 39 | Stafford | Fred'burg City | 15 | 150 | 132 | 482 | 403 | 372 | 7 | 17 | 11 | 11 | 68 | 278 | 245 | 226 | 23 | 95 | 79 | 77 | | | | | 230 | 872 | 738 | 686 | 4.6 | | |
| 40 | Surry | Carlson, J. | 3 | 35 | 55 | 232 | 211 | 206 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 3 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 3 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 59 | 252 | 231 | 226 | 6.5 | | |
| 41 | Warren | Morrison, C. | 4 | 176 | 157 | 680 | 503 | 462 | 3 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 96 | 481 | 373 | 346 | 19 | 97 | 68 | 61 | | | | | 275 | 1274 | 946 | 869 | 4.9 | | |
| 42 | York | Reitz, C. | 6 | 102 | 105 | 445 | 344 | 281 | 3 | 19 | 14 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 24 | 19 | 18 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 115 | 495 | 377 | 312 | 3.1 | | |
| | | | TOTALS | | 432 | 4766 | 5126 | 21041 | 17946 | 16892 | 169 | 718 | 588 | 512 | 1423 | 6409 | 5220 | 4794 | 363 | 1598 | 1306 | 1232 | 128 | 388 | 223 | 218 | 7209 | 30176 | 25305 | 23667 | 5.0 |

HELP WANTED—BE A COUNTY COORDINATOR

By Charlene Talcott, State Coordinator

The Virginia Bluebird Society uses Citizen Scientists to collect data about nesting bluebirds and other cavity nesters, and facilitates their healthy development through weekly monitoring to check on the health of the eggs and nestlings, evidence of predators, and other problems that could prevent a successful fledge. These records are compiled by the County Coordinator and starting this year, will be sent to the State Coordinator. (Previously these were sent to Ann Dunn, who did an excellent job compiling all of the county records.)

County Coordinators are important to help monitors learn protocols and methods, answer questions from the public and members (or know where to where to find the answers), and of course, for compiling the information in the fall. We currently have County Coordinators for 51 counties and independent cities. We are deeply grateful for each and every one of them. Unfortunately, there are 50 vacancies. Please look at your county or city at [County Coordinators \(virginiabluebirds.org\)](http://virginiabluebirds.org). Even if your county has a coordinator, think about offering to help. Many of the coordinators have two or more localities they are coordinating.

TOP FOUR REASONS TO BE A COUNTY COORDINATOR FOR THE VIRGINIA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

- Your records will contribute to scientific research to help populations of bluebirds and other cavity nesters, including chickadees, tree swallows, and house wrens
- You will learn the latest news of the avian world, especially as it pertains to bluebirds.
- You will be supplied with a kit of educational materials, seasonal information and reminders, and encouragement along the way.
- The State Coordinator and current County Coordinators are a helpful bunch, and you can get quick answers to any questions you may have.

County Coordinators will be supplied with a complete kit of educational materials. Anyone dedicated to getting out the message of bluebird conservation can be a coordinator. If you are interested in being considered for a County Coordinator, please contact the state coordinator, Charlene Talcott, at vabluebirdcoordinator@gmail.com.

Relocated Trails at Prices Fork Schools

By Sandy Weber, Montgomery County Coordinator

The Blacksburg High School has hosted a bluebird trail for about 10 years. The exact origins of the trail are a bit cloudy to me, but apparently the trail was set up by Virginia Tech researchers and then turned over to the school's biology department. For the last several years the trail was monitored during summers by the NRV chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists because the students were on break. Last year, after one of the biology teachers retired, all monitoring was by the Master Naturalists.

We have noticed that the productivity for bluebirds on this trail has been quite low, with a lot of predation, ants, and competition from tree swallows and house wrens. Last year

we removed some boxes that were too closely spaced and located near woods edges. Productivity increased slightly. This winter we have made some much bigger changes: we have just made Noel guards for all the boxes, which will be installed next month. We removed more boxes which were too close and in poor habitat, to move them to totally new locations. And we have double-mounted some boxes on the same pole to try to deal with some of the competition. The Montgomery County Public Schools administration has allowed us to relocate the excess boxes to create two small trails at the Prices Fork Elementary School and The Prices Fork Middle School. Both the schools are near the high school and have stormwater drainage areas that must be left unused but must be mowed. Other plans to improve trail performance include keeping foliage around the boxes under better control.

I would like to thank Reinhard Beatty, who made the Noel guards and Philip Hash, Environmental & Maintenance Program Manager for the Montgomery County Public Schools, who took the time to help find suitable locations for the new trails and completed the paperwork required to get permission to install the boxes. Watch this space next year to find out if these changes have been successful.



Waiting for spring: new homes available at the Prices Fork Elementary School

Photo by Sandy Weber

Spotlight on a County Coordinator: Pam Narney, Richmond County

Where do you live? I live on a street that was a once on an island with Placid Bay on one side and Mattox Creek (tidal marsh) on the other side.

Why did you want to get involved? Anne Little and the Northern Neck Master Naturalists introduced me to bluebird monitoring. Bluebird monitoring is yet another chance to be out in nature observing all nature has to offer. And it's a time for quiet reflection and wonder. I want to spread that joy to residents of the two counties I coordinate, Westmoreland and Richmond, especially to the children.

What is your favorite outdoor activity? I would rather be outside doing anything than be in the house, so the outdoor activity I am involved with at the time is my favorite: birding, kayaking, gardening, educating, hiking, or bluebird monitoring.

One goal for the upcoming year: I hope to educate more people on the Northern Neck about the beauty and bounty of the area in which they live, so they can enjoy and respect their environment more.

What do you wish more people knew about you? I am obsessed with osprey. My license plate is OSPRA-QN. We have an osprey nesting platform off of our deck, so we can watch, record, and enjoy their activities. The return of the Osprey represents the resilience of nature and promises hope for the future.



Pam Narney, county coordinator for Westmoreland County

Introducing Newly Appointed Director Daphne Cole

Where do you live? Nottoway County

Why did you want to get involved? I am a Virginia Master Naturalist who has been monitoring Bluebird Trails in both Pocahontas State Park and Blackstone, VA for several years.

What is your favorite outdoor activity? Hard to choose just one. I like to play tennis, garden, hike, conduct water monitoring of the Appomattox River, advocate for the Chesapeake Bay and James River, and conduct bird surveys.

One goal you have for this upcoming year: Plant more native plants and educate others on the importance of native plants and appropriate herbicide and pesticide use.

Introducing Newly Appointed State Coordinator Charlene Talcott

Where do you live? I live on 36 acres of Certified Wildlife Habitat in Lancaster County.

Why did you want to get involved? Paula Boundy, county coordinator for my county, got me involved with bluebird trail monitoring. I fell in love with watching the whole life cycle of the bluebirds, and knowing we were increasing the population of bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Being able to work with Virginia Bluebird Society and its people is a dream job for me.

What is your favorite outdoor activity? It's hard to pick a favorite, but I enjoy gardening, coastal kayaking, hiking through the woods, and birdwatching.

One goal for the upcoming year: Helping the County Coordinators and making their jobs more efficient and enjoyable.

What do you wish more people knew about you? I'm a volunteer puppy raiser for Canine Companions for Independence, so you might see a service dog in training with me if pandemic protocols allow me to visit you all.



Daphne Cole, newly appointed member of VBS Board of Directors



Charlene Talcott, newly appointed State Coordinator

IN MEMORIAM

By Cathy Hindman, Past President, Virginia Bluebird Society

If you have a Virginia Wildlife Conservation license plate on your vehicle, then you may be displaying artwork by Carl 'Spike' Knuth. He is the artist who created our Eastern Bluebird license and I proudly display it. Mr. Knuth passed from this life on November 12, 2020 after a time of declining health. He retired from the Department of Wildlife Resources in 2003 after almost thirty years. His watercolors and photography are on covers of eighty magazines. He donated an original piece of art for the annual Hunters for the Hungry banquet in Roanoke Valley every year and a hundred prints to Ducks Unlimited and other conservation organizations. He was a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and developed his love of the outdoors when young. We will miss his Feathered Friends column in *Cooperative Living* magazine and his artwork for *Virginia Wildlife*.

Sources: *Roanoke Times*, 9/10/2013, *Virginia Wildlife* Jan/Feb 2021, and NOVEC *Cooperative Living* January 2021.



Carl "Spike" Knuth



Newsletter of the
Virginia Bluebird Society
www.virginiabluebirds.org

Our email address is:
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If you have a new email 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*. Email your materials to Judy Hall.

The Bluebird Advisor

By *Christine Boran and Anne Little*



Nest Box Fidelity?

Question: Does the male/female come back to the same nest box for subsequent years to nest again or do they find a new nest?

Answer: We are often asked this question as our bluebird season begins. The answer is a qualified yes, but only if the pair survived the winter and if they fledged their nestlings in that box the year before. The male returns to the box first, and then the female. If she doesn't arrive, the male goes off to find another female. If the male doesn't survive, the female may wait to be claimed by another male, and he may have his own box that he prefers! It can get complicated. Bluebirds begin the fall in family groups and fly with mixed flocks to find food and shelter. Sometimes they will hang around a box all winter and use it as shelter. Later, they go off on their own and do not stay together as a pair. It is the nest box that brings them together again in the spring. Many folds say that "their" bluebirds have returned to the backyard box. But bluebirds all look alike! Unless they are banded, you can never be sure you are seeing the same birds. Just be glad that there are two birds who found each other and are raising the next generation in your box! We have noticed on our trail that bluebirds will play a game we call "musical boxes." A pair may nest in one box the first go-round and then find a different box for Round 2. That may be because of a predator, a sprinkler, or a golf ball, but whatever causes it, there is not necessarily a site preference in some birds.

Reprint from *The Bird Box*, Spring 2011. *The Bluebird Advisor* periodically shares writings submitted by the late Barbara Chambers as *The Answer Lady*.

Do you have a question for the next newsletter's Bluebird Advisor? Send it to woolwinehouse@gmail.com



*Male bluebird with food.
Photo by Christine Boran*

VBS Accepting Young Birder Scholarship Applications.

Know a young person with a passion for birding? The Virginia Bluebird Society is proud to provide scholarships/grants up to a maximum of \$500 to help residents of Virginia, ages 14 - 22 who are interested in birds to attend summer camps, workshops, training programs, conventions and other birding-related activities.

The application form, available on the VBS website at <https://www.virginiabluebirds.org/about-vbs/grant-programs> must be completed by May 1, 2021.



A Painted Redstart observed at Camp Chiricahua Youth Birding Camp.

Photo by Baxter Beamer, recipient of the 2019 VBS Young Birders Scholarship.

Mark Your Calendars

- March 1** Clean out nesting materials added in the fall and make necessary repairs.
- March 6** 10:00 AM, Virtual Board Meeting. Email vbs@virginiabluebirds.org for details.
- April 1** Begin monitoring bluebird nest boxes.
- April 15** Remove ventilation plugs from nest boxes.
- May 1** Summer 2021 Young Birder Scholarship applications due. Details at <https://www.virginiabluebirds.org>
- May 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for Summer newsletter
- June 26** Annual Purple Martin Field Day, Louisa County; see page 3 for information.
- November 12-13** VBS Biennial Conference. **UPDATE:** postponed due to the pandemic.

Check out our *Facebook* page <https://www.facebook.com/Virginia-Bluebird-Society-133048243442687/> for photos and videos throughout the year, and follow us on *Twitter* at https://twitter.com/VA_Bluebirds.

How To Join: Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check, to:

- \$10 for an individual with an emailed newsletter
- \$15 for an individual with a mailed print newsletter
- \$15 for a family with an emailed newsletter
- \$20 for a family with a mailed print newsletter

| |
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| Virginia Bluebird Society 726 William Street Fredericksburg VA 22401 |
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Membership forms are available on the VBS web site: <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org>

Send An Article to The Bird Box

We welcome articles and photos from our active VBS members. We want to share our success stories from your home and your trails. Send your original articles, photos, or artwork, or suggest a topic for a future newsletter. Submit materials to Judy Hall, Editor, at birdboxeditor@gmail.com May 30 to be considered for the Summer newsletter. Please include your contact information, location, identification of people and birds in photos, and name of photographer.



Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg VA 22401