

# The Bird Box Bird Box

Summer 2018 Newsletter of the  
Virginia Bluebird Society [www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://www.virginiabluebirds.org)

## Making Room For Birds in Suburban Areas

By Alison Davis-Holland, Arlington County Coordinator

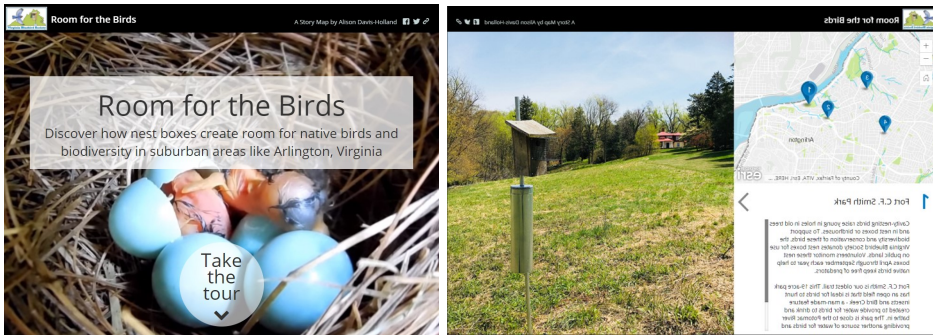
In Arlington County, our bluebird and native bird habitat is more limited, so we have to get creative eking out space for nest boxes. Take a look at our new mapping application showing some places where we have found grassy lawns and water sources in this Washington D.C. suburb.

View the Room for the Birds story map at <https://arcgis.com/arcgis/storymaps/room-for-the-birds>.



## The Bird Box Bird Box

Inside this issue



Cover of **A Story Map**, an interactive online map of bluebird box installations in Arlington County. Cover photo by Christine Boran

One of the locations depicted in **A Story Map**

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## Hanover County Bluebird Project 2018

By Carolyn Phillips, Hanover County Coordinator, and Terry Atkinson, Virginia Master Naturalist Project, Riverine Chapter

Bluebirds are busting out all over in Hanover County! In coordination with the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) Riverine Chapter and Hanover County Parks and Recreation, the Bluebird project for Hanover County VA is flying high! Karen Dorgan (former Riverine Chapter member) and Carolyn Phillips started the first bluebird trail in 2016 with 6 boxes at Poor Farm Park off Route 54. First year results: 27 Bluebird eggs and 23 babies fledging.



Left: site of first Hanover Bluebird trail

Right: Karen Dorgan and Carolyn Phillips



Continued on page 2

## Hanover County Bluebird Project 2018, *continued from page 1*

In 2017, inspired with success and the enthusiasm of more volunteers, a second trail was set up at Montpelier Park off Route 33, monitored by Terry Atkinson and Jane Taft, both members of Virginia Master Naturalists Riverine Chapter. Rick Richardson, a resident of Covenant Woods Retirement Community in Mechanicsville, led the set up of a new trail,



and 6 additional boxes were added to Poor Farm Park. Our second year yielded 78 Bluebird eggs and 64 babies fledging, 10 Carolina Chickadee eggs and 3 fledging, and 4 Titmouse eggs and 4 fledging.



*Left and Right: Hanover's second and third trails*

Now that it's 2018 we are hooked, and the thrill of seeing eggs and babies is still amazing. Trails were set up at Taylor Park off Route 54, Courthouse Park off Route 301, and on private property in Beaverdam. Both Courthouse Park and Beaverdam are very new and not reporting yet, but in a few weeks the second round of nesting should begin. A new box builder joined our ranks, Irv Kenyon from Ashland. We bid farewell to Karen and Dan Dorgan as they have begun their grandparent roles in Alabama. More volunteers from the VMN Riverine Chapter have joined: David



Sumner, Phyllis Bowles, and Lyz Adams.

After the first round of nestings this year we have 56 Bluebird eggs and 15 Carolina Chickadees.

*Left and right: Hanover's two newest Bluebird Trail locations*



Building boxes and getting them set up is a labor of love and box monitoring is an adventure each time we open one. The impact of our efforts is remarkable. Our data is collected, compiled, and forwarded to the VBS each year as a source for research and data collection of native cavity nesters in Virginia. In addition, we provide educational outreach and have done presentations to Elementary School Science Clubs, Citizen Organizations, and gatherings such as the Ashland Strawberry Faire and VMN Riverine Chapter Open House. Our next goal is to set up a trail for next year at Pole Green Park in Mechanicsville and explore more outreach programs in the community. If you would like more information, contact:

Carolyn Phillips, Hanover County Coordination VBS, 804-572-5267, carolyn-phillips@comcast.net, or

Terry Atkinson, VMN Project, teatkinson@gmail.com

### Summary of the Hanover Bluebird Project

Year	Boxes	Bluebird eggs/fledglings	Chickadee eggs/fledglings	Other eggs/fledglings
2016	6	27/23	0/0	0/0
2017	22	78/64	10/3	4/4
2018*	39	56/*	15/*	0*

\* First round of nesting, fledging just beginning

## Orange County Bluebird Trails

By Chris Browning, Orange County Coordinator

Orange County has had a successful start to its Bluebird season. The trails from last year have been reopened and several of the boxes that are on the Prospect Heights Middle School, the James Madison, Montpelier, and the Locust Grove Middle School Trails have been moved and repaired.

The Lake of the Woods Golf Course has added one new box to its trail making 18 boxes now instead of 17, with a few of the original boxes being either repaired or replaced as well.

The Dogwood Village Trail remains a popular project with residents of this assisted living facility. The monitors of this trail make sure to schedule their monitoring at the same time that the residents are out in their garden so they are able to view the box activity along with the monitors.

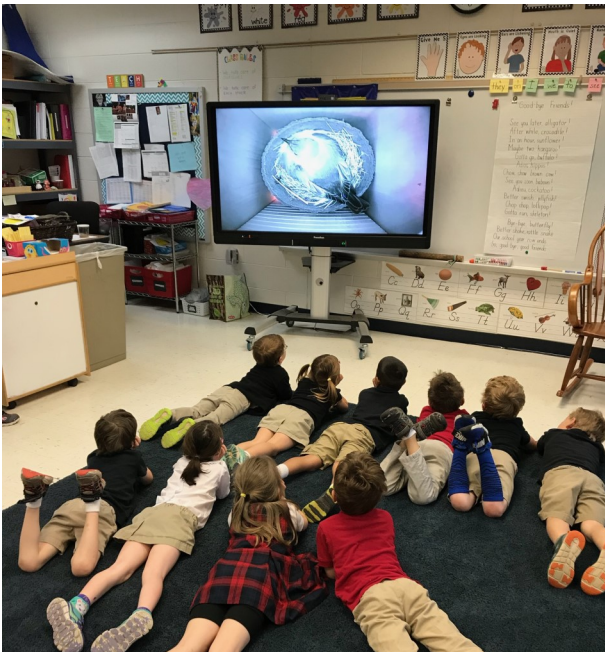
We have also gained another trail this year. We're calling it the Jones Mill Trail. VBS member Jo Schafer has graciously stepped up and is monitoring this trail. This trail has been in existence for some time, just not officially monitored until this year. It presently is made up of five boxes and we are hoping to have a very successful season with it, along with all of the others.



Photo taken Monday, April 16, 2018, by Chris Browning

## Nest Cam at North Cross Elementary School

Submitted by Lucy Ellett, Roanoke Virginia



The bird cam supplied by the Virginia Bluebird Society has been a huge hit. North Cross School set it up so that entire families can watch it at home on YouTube. Many thanks to Earl Morris, Jr and the rest of the Virginia Bluebird Society for making this possible.

For more information and a link to the livestream, watch the video at <https://youtu.be/YTFRsIWM0pl> (or search YouTube for North Cross Bluebird Cam).

*Left: Four year olds at North Cross School watching the baby Bluebirds on YouTube*

## Tweeting About The Birds

By Cathy Hindman and Alison Davis-Holland

As part of our mission to promote education and awareness of bluebird and other cavity-nesting birds, we have started a Twitter account. It is open for anyone to follow. We will be posting helpful information for the community. You can visit it at [https://twitter.com/VA\\_Bluebirds](https://twitter.com/VA_Bluebirds). Please follow us, retweet our first tweet to let others know that we are now on Twitter, and add @VA\_Bluebirds to any Twitter posts about your work. We would love to hear about it and retweet your posts.

## Thwarting House Sparrows

By Doug Rogers, Virginia Bluebird Society Board Member

We monitor a nest box trail on three pieces of private property just outside of Charlottesville on a ridge called Pantops Mountain. There are five boxes on two of the properties and four on the remaining one. We have had more predation on this trail during the five years we have monitored here than we ever had before.

The good news is that we have now thwarted all of the predators – House Sparrows, black snakes, blow flies, mites and the unknown predator.

To thwart the House Sparrows, we used the Linda Violette double-holed mansion with some success until this year. This year, we had a House Sparrow claim one of the double-holed mansions and start to build a nest. I discussed this with a friend who has lots of House Sparrows on his property and he has zero of them in his Bluebird boxes. He hangs a shiny nut (as in “nut and bolt”) on each side of his boxes. According to him, the swinging nuts drive the House Sparrows crazy and do not faze the Bluebirds or the Tree Swallows.

I tried this technique on my double-holed mansion. The House Sparrow ignored the nuts and kept building his nest. However, the box had a Noel guard on it and the sparrow would hang out in the guard. Thinking he must have felt safe in the Noel guard, I removed it and left the nuts in place; the House Sparrow has not returned. Now I have a pair of Tree Swallows building their nest there.

If you have House Sparrows, give this a try.



*Birdwatcher with a Camera*



*Birdwatcher with a Camera*



*Birdwatcher with a Camera*

Top: Bluebird box with deterrents (hex nuts) hanging on fishing line

Above and Left: Tree Swallows ignoring the House Sparrow deterrents as they enter and exit the box.

Photos by Doug Rogers, the Birdwatcher With A Camera

## House Wren Deterrence

By Jane Hesler, Chesterfield County Co-coordinator

Many of our Bluebirds and Chickadees were well into nesting season in spite of the cold spring. We had chicks and eggs in many boxes when during the first week of May an invasion of House Wrens arrived. Our eggs and hatchlings were not going to last long. The darling little wrens want to remove all nests and fill every box on our trail with sticks. House Wrens are not good at sharing.

Our boxes all have Noel guards and installing the house wren guard that is described on many sites means removing the Noel guard. We tried this in previous years and were met with limited success. Out of desperation we decided to try something new. The theory behind the traditional wren guard is that the house wren will not bother the box if it



can't see the hole. Hiding the hole might act as a deterrent. We wanted to deter the wren without removing the Noel guard and of course without bothering our nesting birds. We had the idea to wrap aluminum foil around the top and sides of the Noel guard. The hope was that the wren would leave the box alone but our nesting birds would not be bothered. We wrapped the foil on the Noel guards of boxes that had been attacked by the wrens.

The first was a box with six chickadee hatchlings. We had a camera in the box and one morning we saw the house wren pecking the little hatchlings. We tried the aluminum foil and it worked. The house wren gave up and went elsewhere. The chickadees were unfazed and went on with feeding the hatchlings.

Then we tried it on a second box where a bluebird was laying eggs. We spotted a wren going in the box. In other years the house wren pulled the eggs out as fast as they were laid and dropped them on the ground. Once we wrapped the Noel guard with the aluminum foil our bluebirds went ahead and laid more eggs and the wren went on to find another nesting site.

We hope this simple solution continues to work and our house wrens find places to nest elsewhere. They are cute little birds but we can't let them dominate on our trails.



Top: House Wren pecking at Chickadee hatchlings

Bottom: Bluebird box with aluminum foil wren deterrent

## From Your President

**Cathy Hindman, Virginia Bluebird Society President**

I've had a really great spring seeing lots of babies in the nests! It never gets boring for me after 20 years of monitoring. With social media and email I am able to stay in touch with VBS members all over the state and bluebirders beyond Virginia. VBS has an active Facebook account and now a Twitter one too.

Please do not hesitate to email any board member if you are interested in volunteering at a state level. We welcome new board members with new ideas. Currently there are several counties without a coordinator. What does a coordinator job entail? Connecting to your county members and ensuring that all trails are monitored. Gathering the data and sending it in to our data manager, Ann Dunn. And in our county, we have a fall gathering to celebrate all the fledglings. This newsletter celebrates the success of our many trails! Enjoy!

*Cathy*

## Special Thanks

**Thank you to our sustaining and endowment members who support VBS:**

### **Endowment Members 2017/18**

Curtis Backus  
Vivian Bruzzese  
Garth Kemper  
Ann Elise Sauer  
Nora Wilson-Lesser  
Northern Neck Audubon Society  
The Senior Center of Leesburg  
Underwood Living Trust  
Wild Birds Unlimited of Fredericksburg VA

### **Sustaining Members 2017/18**

Donald and Diana Akers  
Joanne and David Bauer  
Christopher Browning  
Janet Doerr  
Anna Goddard  
Ronald Grimes  
Richard Hudgins  
Ulrike Joiner  
Robert and Jennifer Katt  
Regina Klemt  
Elizabeth Manns  
Suzanne Miller & Tony Quezon  
Carl and MaryEllen Otto  
Paula Parsons  
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Keith Peterson  
Sharon Plocher  
Debbie Reubush  
Elizabeth Walker  
Alfred Wilson III  
AYR Hill Garden Club  
Hampton Roads Bird Club  
Historic Rivers Chapter VMN

**These members sponsor Bluebird boxes. We are thankful for their support.**

Donald and Diana Akers  
Bonnie Bernstein  
Mike and Sheila Bishop  
Lillian Ursula Bivens  
Sheree Brown  
Amy Goetschius Carle  
Ralph Harvard  
Mary Ann Harvey  
JoAnn Hathaway  
Amy Settle  
Roger and Pat Temple  
Paul and Sandra Uhler  
Thomas Wasmund  
Carolyn Williams  
Alfred Wilson  
Nora Wilson-Lesser

**We are also thankful for these generous donations that help us carry on the mission of VBS:**

Donald and Diane Akers  
David and Joanne Bauer  
Judith Booker  
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Augusta Bird Club  
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Federal Home Loan Mortgage Company  
Fredericksburg Birding Club  
Historic Rivers Chapter VMN  
Master Gardener Rappahannock  
Also, Susan Kitts' In Memory donation, and Quantico Garden Club, speaking donation

Newsletter of the  
**Virginia Bluebird Society**  
[www.virginiabluebirds.org](http://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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*Open, seeking volunteer*

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

## The Bluebird Advisor

By Christine Boran and Anne Little



### Dear Bluebird Advisor: I Have Ants In My Bluebird Box! What do I do?

Ants climb up for survival to keep from drowning in pooling waters after heavy rains and sometimes will find the nest box pole to escape the water. If that's the case, they are seeking cover - we see them moving around inside or under a nest and not attacking the nestlings. Other times, ants will be attracted to a nest box if a nestling has died. There are different ways to deal with ants depending on the circumstance. If there are nestlings and they are featherless, they are at greater risk from ants. If the nestlings are feathered and at or above the age of 10 - 12 days old, there is less risk. If just a few ants are seeking cover from rain, and the ants' behaviors show they are not attacking the nestlings, you can gently lift the nest using a paint scraper and brush out as many ants as you can under the nest, on the edges of the nest material, on the inner and outer walls, on top of the nest box, and on the top of the pole using a clean paintbrush, and close the box. Then apply a thick ring of plain Vaseline petroleum jelly about 3 - 4 inches wide on the conduit UNDER the stovepipe, to keep the Vaseline off wildlife and make it last longer from sun and rain. If there is a heavy infestation of ants or if ants have entered due to a deceased bird, remove the deceased bird first. Prepare to do a manual nest change. It is wise to do this with a helper, if possible. While the nest box is still closed, collect similar materials used by Mom bird, pine needles or clean dried grasses, and fashion a new nest and shape it similar to the original - use your fist to create a nest cup and smooth it. Open the box and carefully take the whole nest with the nestlings out of the nest box and put the infested nest and nestlings in a small box with a lid to keep them calm and out of bright light. Have your helper hold that box with the lid on. If you have no helper, do not put the box on the ground as this attracts predators. With clean hands or with a disposable glove, pick up each baby bird one by one (they are fragile - do not roll them) and gently place them on the new nest. Close and secure the box. Dispose of the deceased bird and the infested ant nest far away from the nest box - then apply the Vaseline on the pole under the stovepipe guard. NOTE: If the fledglings are 12-13 days old or older, it is better to not do a nest change since it may cause premature fledging. During the nesting season, make a few extra manmade nests using an empty nest box as your mold, and then keep each one in shape by storing it in a small box. Keep them on hand ready to use for nest change emergencies. Keep that Vaseline always available in your bluebird supply bag.

### The Bluebird Advisor

Send your questions to [vbs@virginiabluebirds.org](mailto:vbs@virginiabluebirds.org)

## Mark Your Calendars

- August 30** Deadline for submitting articles, photos, ideas, and artwork for fall newsletter
- September** Collect trail data and send to County Coordinator and/or Ann Dunn.
- November** VBS Board Meeting, 10:00 am in Charlottesville, Location to be determined, email Cathy Hindman. All county coordinators are invited.
- March 12-15, 2020** **Save the date!** NABS Conference in Kearney, Nebraska. More information will be posted later at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org/](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/).

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](https://twitter.com/VA_Bluebirds).

## 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 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 [carjuwa@hotmail.com](mailto:carjuwa@hotmail.com) by August 30 to be considered for the fall newsletter.*



**Virginia Bluebird Society**  
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**Fredericksburg VA 22401**