

Bluebird Trail Information  
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Box Mounting and Placement

- Entrance hole should be 5 (or more) feet from ground and box should be mounted on smooth metal pole to include predator proofing. Install at eye level for ease of monitoring.
- 10' EMT poles are often cut down to 8' and then driven 2' into the ground. T-posts also work well.
- Install wobbly predator baffle on pole just under box.
- Boxes can be constructed of pine, but preferably 1" thick rough sided cedar. They should have good drainage ventilation. If you use pine, you need to paint them. They must be painted a light color such as tan or pale green (not white) and never painted inside.
- Face away from prevailing winds. Hole should face south or southeast.
- Avoid mounting on fence line or trees (predator concerns).
- Avoid mounting near buildings (prime House Sparrow territory).
- In areas with water, tree swallows may be prevalent. In such areas, pair boxes for bluebirds and tree swallows, spacing them 12 - 20 feet (15 feet good rule) apart. Have boxes facing generally southeast, but turn entrance holes slightly so birds can see each other. Pairing this way allows for tree swallows to live adjacent to bluebirds. Bluebirds eat insects off the ground and tree swallows eat insects in the air so they do not compete for food.
- Directly next to lake, may want to space boxes **25 yards apart**. You will primarily have tree swallows in these boxes, as bluebirds require 100 yard spacing (different species have different territorial requirements).
- Space paired box stations at least 100 – 150 yards apart.
- Avoid brushy & heavily wooded areas (house wrens may pierce the eggs or kill the hatchlings if located in this prime wren territory). Boxes should be placed at least 40 - 50 yards from such areas.
- Open country with scattered trees and low or sparse ground cover is good habitat for Eastern Bluebirds. Mowed lawns with solitary trees for sentry post are perfect.
- Avoid pesticide or herbicide use as much as possible.
- If you would like to see a successful bluebird trail, visit Arbor Ridge Park in Powell.

Monitoring Boxes

- Monitor at least once a week during nesting season. Do not monitor if it is cold and wet.
- Have boxes ready mid-March.
- **MUST** practice passive and/or active House Sparrow control.
- Bluebirds lay 4 - 6 light blue or white eggs. She generally lays one egg per day until the clutch is complete. Incubation begins only after all eggs are laid.
- Incubation period = 12 – 14 days.
- Check nest and nestlings for blowfly larva. On my trails, I find these late in nesting season when temperatures are warmest. After picking larva off babies, babies can be placed in soft velvet bag to keep them warm and safe while you gently remove nest and pick out remaining blowfly larva or replace nest entirely with new one fashioned from dry white pine needles or dried grass. Do **NOT** place babies in material with regular or loose weave as their toenails will become ensnared in the material. Larva can be

- removed from the nest and left on ground under box where adults will likely find and eat them. Do not use pesticides to control larva. Replace nesting material and babies as soon as possible.
- Any dead birds should be removed from the nest and disposed of (do not throw on ground as smell may attract predators).
  - Do not open box after nestlings are 12 - 14 days old. If you do, they may be frightened off the nest and fledge too soon, reducing their chance for survival.
  - Nestlings generally fledge 17 – 18 days after hatching.
  - Remove nests when all have fledged, use scraper.
  - Keep accurate data of your monitoring practices on the trail. Cornell NestWatch is a wonderful, free computer database with Citizen Science in mind. If not computer savvy, data can be compiled on trail sheet and summary turned into the Ohio Bluebird Society at end of season.

### Predation & Competition

- Bluebirds start nesting in mid-March. House Wrens come back to the area in mid to late April and may pierce eggs in houses if in wren-friendly habitat or wren-established area. House Wrens are a protected bird, so proper box placement at least 40 – 50 yards from brushy or heavily treed areas is important.
- Chickadees are also native cavity nesters and may begin to nest as early as mid-March in your box. If the box is in a wren-friendly area, you may want to mount an L-shaped wood barrier called a Wren guard in front of hole AFTER the chickadees have laid their first egg and before the wrens come back in April. The L-shaped wood piece essentially should be mounted with horizontal piece (about 1 ½” in length) above hole and vertical piece hanging down to block the view of the entrance hole from the wren. It is theorized that the returning wrens will not see the entrance hole, and will not enter. The chickadees will still be able to enter to care for their young. To decrease House Wren competition later in season, simply block entry hole of box after May 31<sup>st</sup> as Chickadees will not nest after this time.
- House Sparrows are very aggressive – both the male and female. They will pierce eggs, throw babies from the nest and kill adult birds while setting on the nest. The House Sparrow is not native to this country and is therefore not a protected species. In fact, they have drastically reduced the population of native cavity nesting birds due to their aggressive nature during the nesting season. House Sparrows MUST be controlled. Do not allow them to breed in your boxes. Passive control measures include discontinuing seed feeding, and placing box as far from human structures as possible. Active management can include removing their nests and eggs; piercing House Sparrow eggs with sharp needle to render them nonviable; or in-box trapping (much preferred). Active measures may be legally employed at your discretion as House Sparrows are a non-native invasive species.
- Raccoons, domestic cats and snakes can easily climb up poles to get to eggs or nestlings. A baffle placed on the pole is highly recommended to prevent predation. At the very least, axle grease can be smeared on the pole to deter predators from climbing up. Never mount a box on a tree.
- On public trails, a sign can be placed on each house to inform the public of the protected status of bluebirds so they leave the boxes alone.

### Bluebird Trail Kit

- Backpack
- 2 or 3" metal scraper (clean houses)
- Small mirror
- Van Ert Universal Sparrow Traps <http://www.vanerttraps.com/>
- Mesh laundry bag
- Penlight
- Ziploc sandwich baggies
- Trash bags (plastic grocery bags)
- Hand sanitizer - unscented
- Binoculars
- Phillips head screw driver or small power drill with Phillips attachment
- Vaseline - thin layer (put on inside roof surface – keep wasps out)
- Vaseline on mounting pipe between baffle and bottom of nestbox to keep ants out
- Grease for poles (if not using PVC baffles)
- Extra screws and extra screwdriver ☺
- Small steno pad or data sheets
- Pens
- Small first aid kit or bandaids including tweezers for tick removal

### Contacts:

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