

Bird Beat #79 Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

By Jared Parks



Are your bluebird boxes ready?

Most of our breeding birds aren't even in the Country much less thinking about nesting. They won't return to their breeding grounds for at least a couple of months yet, so why am I asking you about your nesting boxes? Well, it's because bluebirds are already planning their next brood and making the rounds to decide where that might be.

Erecting and tending to a bird house isn't the most involved thing you will ever do, but it does take a bit of forethought and year-round care.

If you would like to try your hand at hosting bluebirds, there are a few things that you will need to know to get started. First, bluebirds are open land birds that prefer areas like farm fields and meadows, but they are cavity nesters, so they need a few older trees (or a constructed home) for a proper abode. If you live in a forest or a dense housing development, bluebirds won't be a common bird in your yard. If you do live in suitable habitat, success is dependent on getting the right box, setting it up correctly, and monitoring it.

I make my own boxes, and you can too, but it is also easy to find boxes for sale. If you would like to pay us a visit in Snow Hill (pun intended), you can even get one of my hand-made boxes in our Bee Hive store. Once you have a box, you will need to locate a good, open area in your yard to place it. Bluebird boxes should be about 100 feet or more apart, but depending on the shape and organization of your yard, it may be possible to put them closer together. The correct boxes all have a standard-sized entrance hole (1.5 inches in diameter) and similar interior area.

It is not recommended to mount a box on a tree or a fencepost as those locations are easy access for predators. I mount my boxes on a metal conduit pole and use a length of PVC pipe with cap to keep the birds safe (see photo). The boxes should be mounted so the opening is about 5 feet off the ground and oriented so it faces in any easterly direction (never west into the hot afternoon sun). Importantly, as

stated above, the box should be up and cleaned-out by the end of February when the mated pairs start looking for a good home. My earliest nest was started in March, and I watched the pair check out all 5 of my boxes starting in early February before they settled on the one they liked best.

The North American Bluebird Society (<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>) is one of the top resources for information about bluebirds and bluebird boxes. They have all the information you need to be a good landlord and raise healthy and happy bluebirds.