

Monitoring Monthly Guide

- **February/March:** Check boxes for dead bluebirds (some boxes are used as roosts during severe weather) See **dead bluebirds** below. Clean out any mouse nests, wasps, etc. to make the boxes available for birds.
- **Mid-June:** Remember to remove weather-stripping and make sure the ventilation holes are not plugged by insects or other material.
- **June/July:** Clean out all boxes that other species have finished using. This gives the bluebirds an opportunity to try again if their first brood failed or if the box was usurped by swallows or wrens. A pair of bluebirds that initially nested elsewhere may be looking at your box for their next brood.
- **July:** When young are in the nest box and temperatures are expected to rise above 90 degrees F for 3 or more days, the box should be shaded from late afternoon sun.
- **Early August:** Look for that sweet surprise, a third brood!
- **September/October:** Before the rains begin, check boxes and clean those that were not scraped out earlier.* Plug holes, caulk any splitting panels, and put weather-stripping over vents to keep out wind and rain.

**Some people prefer to leave used nests in the boxes until spring. This is largely due to the theoretical benefit of wasps that parasitize blowfly pupae. When the nests are cleaned out, the pupae are removed and this may result in the removal of any wasps that may be parasitizing them. In our experience, this has not been a helpful strategy, and we regard used nests as potentially harboring other diseases and parasites that could harm roosting bluebirds.*

Dead Bluebirds: When dead bluebirds are found in nest boxes during late winter and early spring, please be sure to save any bands and report the numbers (and/or colors) to the trail coordinator for your county, then dispose of the bird in a sanitary fashion. If you find a dead adult bluebird on the ground during the nesting process, with no apparent cause of death, please place the bird in a sealed plastic bag and label it with the date, your name, location, and any other helpful information, then place it in a freezer. Contact Rita Snyder to ask about a possible necropsy. Alternatively, you may follow the procedure for dead bluebirds found in nest boxes.

Box Cleaning: When cleaning the box after each nesting (brood), remove as much nesting material as possible and sweep the floor of the box with a small brush, being careful to avoid inhaling any dust. Look through the nesting material for any dead birds (sometimes tiny skeletons are found) and report any losses accordingly. If any nestlings perished after banding but before fledging, it is very important for us to know the band number(s). Be sure to discard used nests at least 30 feet away from the nest box, so as not to attract predators. If many blowfly pupae or other parasites are present, we suggest sealing the nest material and sweepings in a plastic bag and discarding it with your household waste.

Data Recording: Please use the nesting calendar and monitoring data sheet printed out from "How to Monitor Bluebird Nest Boxes." Record the dates and activities as demonstrated in the handout, then send the data sheets to your county coordinator at the end of the nesting season. It is very important to RECORD FAILED NESTING ATTEMPTS this way as well. We appreciate receiving the data before September 30th each year, as we have deadlines to report our data to other entities.

Feeding Bluebirds: Providing live mealworms can help bluebirds raise a brood during poor spring weather, increase winter survival, and help a widowed bird raise a brood alone. However, we must approach feeding with caution and with clear objectives that should be re-evaluated as conditions change. Bluebirds, like most creatures, require a varied diet. Copious feeding of mealworms may rob them of nutrients essential to their health and survival. Patterns of feeding movements can be studied by hawks and other predators, resulting in the demise of the very birds you seek to help. (Actually, feeders and feeding locations for ALL species should be moved periodically). Also, a weak bird may be kept alive by supplementary food when the natural course of events would have been for its mate to find a new mate in time to successfully reproduce. The list of considerations is long. The bottom line is that we must always consider nature's process of natural selection as well as the law of unintended consequences in everything we do. For suet recipes, go to www.sialis.org.