

# Getting to Know Eastern

# BLUE BIRDS



Photo, male eastern bluebird: US Fish & Wildlife Service

The colorful eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) was once a common songbird throughout our state. That was until bluebirds lost much of their natural nesting habitat. Bluebirds are "cavity-nesters" and like to build nests in tree holes. As we began to cut down dying and dead trees rather than letting them fall naturally, and began replacing wooden fenceposts with other materials for fences around farms and pastures, the eastern bluebird population began to decline dramatically. Other threats to bluebirds that have impacted their populations include insecticide use, severe winter weather, and the introduction of aggressive non-native species, such as house sparrows and European starlings.

Today, the bluebird population is beginning to rebound, thanks to the conservation efforts of many people and organizations who are committed to creating new habitat and manmade nesting cavities in the form of bluebird nesting boxes.

**Nesting time is here!** Bluebirds will be raising their families, or *broods*, through spring and summer, many in a box designed just for them (see below and right). Once the mating season is over, bluebirds leave their boxes and join together in larger flocks. North Carolina bluebirds do not migrate; they will feed together and roost in pine tree stands and nesting cavities through the colder winter months.

### WANT TO HELP BLUEBIRDS? INSTALL A BLUEBIRD BOX!

- Find a quality bluebird box kit or plan at [nabluebirdsociety.org](http://nabluebirdsociety.org) or [www.nestboxbuilder.com](http://www.nestboxbuilder.com).
- Place your box in a semi-open grassy area at least 25 ft. away from the woods, and near a fence or some medium-sized trees (place only one box per 100 yards).
- Install your box about 5 feet off the ground so you can easily monitor it at least several times a week.
- Once eggs are present, let the mother know you're approaching before opening the door.
- Check to make sure the nest is dry; remove any insects and keep aggressive birds and snakes away from the nest box.
- Quit monitoring about 12 days after the eggs hatch. The nestlings will fledge, or leave the box, 17-18 days after hatching.
- Once the fledglings are gone, remove the old nest to make room for a new one (bluebirds will build a new nest on top of the old one if not removed).



This bluebird box has an opening that is just the right size for bluebirds to enter and exit. In April, bluebird parents make a nest out of straw and pine needles inside the box. In May, the first brood of babies will hatch and leave the box. Bluebird couples may raise up to three broods each year!



Enjoy getting to know eastern bluebirds! For more information, visit the following websites: North Carolina Bluebird Society at [www.ncbluebird.com](http://www.ncbluebird.com); North American Bluebird Society at [nabluebirdsociety.org](http://nabluebirdsociety.org); Sialis at [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org).