

## *Tips on Establishing a Bluebird Trail*

1. Select good bluebird habitat - open country with scattered trees and shrubs, and low ground cover. Pastures, golf courses, parks, roadsides and cemeteries are examples of good locations. Avoid brushy or heavily wooded areas, or places where pesticides are used heavily.
2. Keep boxes well away from farm buildings (at least ¼ mile); this will help discourage house sparrows from using your boxes.
3. Mount nest boxes on metal posts, no closer together than 100 yards, and 5 feet from the ground. Face boxes to the east or southeast, if possible. It helps if the birds have a perch in sight of the front of the box.
4. Check boxes about once a week during the nesting season, more frequently early in the season. Remove any house sparrow nests immediately. Remove nests of other species after the young have fledged. Bluebirds will often nest again and raise a second or even third brood in a single season.
5. Inspect, and repair if necessary, all boxes in late winter. Boxes should be clean and ready for use by mid-March.
6. Only put up as many boxes as you have time to monitor properly.

## Monitoring Your Nest Boxes

Bluebirds raise one or two broods (occasionally three) during the late March through August nesting season. Nest boxes must be monitored throughout this 15-20 week period. Ideally, nest boxes should be visited on an average of every seven days. By checking regularly, you will observe happenings at the nest that otherwise go unnoticed or unrecorded. You will be able to determine egg-hatching dates for different nest boxes and then know when the nestlings are ready to fledge.

By checking your nest boxes regularly, you will also be able to defend your bluebirds against some of their natural enemies. **We do not recommend putting up bluebird houses unless you plan to monitor them weekly!**

1. Check all nest boxes every 7 days. It helps to keep a dated, written record of each visit to each nest box. If you plan to submit your records to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, use their recommended data forms (available at [www.braw.org](http://www.braw.org)).
2. Never check nest boxes during inclement weather, especially in April and May. Do not disturb the box if the temperature is below 55 degrees F.
3. Check nest boxes in early spring (March to mid-April) to make certain they are clean.
4. It is desirable to flush the hen bluebird out of the box before opening it, because she may be injured or even killed as she tries to fly out of a partially-opened box. Also, it's much easier to inspect the eggs, young, and nest condition without the bird sitting on the nest. To do this, approach the box to within 15 feet or so, stop and make a loud "pishing" sound; repeat this several times. If she doesn't leave the nest box, stand behind the box and tap on the roof or back until she leaves.
5. Once the adult is off the nest, record the number of eggs and/or nestlings. Check the nest for ants or other problems.
6. Avoid opening the nest box when the nestlings are close to fledging (12 days or older). If they get too excited the nestlings may jump from the box prematurely and will be very vulnerable to ground predators.
7. If nestlings escape prematurely, plug the entrance hole with grass, put the young birds back into the box and wait for them to settle down. Then quietly remove the grass plug and hope they will stay in the box!
8. Do not spend a long time near the nest. This may keep the hen off the eggs or prevent the adults from feeding the young.
9. **Whenever a House Sparrow nest is found, remove it immediately, including the eggs and/or young birds!**
10. After the young have fledged, remove the old nest and scrape off any droppings or other materials inside the nest box. This may stimulate the female to build a new nest and start a new brood.