

Songbirds of Missouri

Blue Bird



Vocabulary

Match the word with the definition, then write a sentence using each word. Share your sentences with the class.

- ___ Decline A. To sit on to provide the warmth needed for hatching
- ___ Recovering B. The number of eggs produced by a female bird
- ___ Residents C. Young birds that have acquired the necessary feathers for flying
- ___ Perching D. A family of young birds
- ___ Cavity E. Regaining population
- ___ Clutch F. A natural setting such as prairie, woodlands, mountains, pastures, etc.
- ___ Incubate G. To lessen in population
- ___ Fledglings H. Animals living in a particular place for a continuous period of time
- ___ Broods I. A hollow space within a tree
- ___ Landscape J. Resting atop a pole, branch, wire, etc.

(Show-Me Standards: CA 1, CA 6, Goal 2.1)

Classroom Activity

Objectives: After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the nesting needs of a bluebird
- Describe the brood-rearing cycle of a bluebird
- List problems nesting bluebirds encounter from other animals and from humans.

Materials:

Bluebird nesting boxes (materials, building instructions and other information can be found in the free publications "Woodworking for Wildlife," and "Bluebirds in Missouri," available at most Department of Conservation offices. Make enough bluebird boxes so the class can be split into four or five teams – one team per box. Each team should have a biology professional or local birding expert as a squad leader.

Background:

Bluebirds readily accept appropriately placed man-made nest boxes. Proper location and close

monitoring of the box are keys to nesting success.

Procedure:

Bluebird boxes work best at rural locations.

- Place nest boxes in open grassy areas that have perching sites. Fences, power lines, scattered trees or nearby woods can be good perches.
- Mount the box on a lone post about four to five feet off the ground. (Bluebirds will nest at any height, but this height is convenient for human observation.) Posts can be fitted with a 24-inch metal sleeve to discourage climbing predators. Nest boxes on fence posts may work, but posts in fence rows can become overgrown with brush, enabling snakes and other predators to enter the box. Tree trunks aren't a good location for bluebird boxes because boxes are often too shaded or can easily be invaded by squirrels or snakes. Multiple boxes should be placed approximately 300 feet apart.
- Once a bluebird pair initiates nesting,

periodically open the box and check the eggs or young until they reach 13 days of age. After that, leave the young alone so they are not frightened and do not leave the nest too early.

- Nest box maintenance is important because bluebirds can have two – and sometimes three – nestings in a year. Clean out the old nest material as soon as the young have fledged, and discard old nest material to discourage sparrows from nesting in the box.

It's important to continue to look after and maintain a bluebird box once it's in place. Boxes that are not looked after may benefit bluebird competitors such as house sparrows and starlings. There is evidence that neglected nest boxes may do more harm to bluebirds than if there were no boxes at all.

Grade levels: 4-12

(Show-Me Standards: S 3, 4; Goal 1.3)

Short Answer Q&A

1. When did the bluebird population experience a steep decline?
2. What two birds do scientists think were partly responsible for the bluebird decline?
3. How did these two birds threaten the bluebird population?
4. What conservation efforts helped the bluebird population recover?
5. How do bluebirds keep their nests clean?
6. How do the bluebird's nesting habits differ from most other birds?
7. Where can bluebirds usually be seen?

(Show-Me Standards: Goal 1.5)

Fast Fact

Waste removal is an important part of keeping a crowded nest of baby bluebirds clean.

Like a number of other bird species, adult bluebirds instinctively know that a necessary parenting duty is "poop" clean-up, and parents meticulously remove waste from the nest once offspring are born.

Besides cleanliness, a more important reason for removing waste material is that the smell can attract predators to the nest.