

GUIDE TO BLUEBIRD CONSERVATION

Once common, the **Bluebird** has shown an estimated 90% decline in numbers over the past 50 years. Causes of this decline include loss of habitat, competition with non-native birds, and possibly pesticide use. In response to this problem, the New York Nest Box Network has been initiated to promote the establishment of new nesting boxes for bluebirds. All existing bluebird boxes across New York will be mapped and any new boxes you construct will expand this Network. We hope this guide provides you with new information and ideas on bluebird conservation and that you have enjoyable and successful results as you begin your own bluebird conservation project.

There are 3 species of bluebirds found in the United States. Only one breeds here in New York, the **Eastern Bluebird** (*Sialia sialis*). This bluebird breeds in both the United States and Canada, east of the Rocky Mountains.

BLUEBIRDS THROUGH THE SEASONS

Springtime

Respect for the bluebird is deeply rooted in American culture. This celebrated bird has long been a symbol of hope and happiness. Because of their early return to the northern parts of their range, the bluebird today remains a symbol of springtime. The lengthening days of late February and March bring with them the arrival of bluebirds in search of suitable nesting sites. The male usually returns before the female and immediately starts searching for several unoccupied cavities or nesting boxes he considers suitable for nesting. Bluebirds are a cavity-nesting species and they nest and raise their young in holes of dead trees, fence posts, or in nest boxes.

Bluebirds are insectivores; they feed on a large number of insects that are harmful to crops (especially cutworms and grasshoppers). An exposed post, wire or branch is used as a perch for scanning the ground for insects. The bluebird will fly down to catch its prey and will return to the original or nearby perch.

Courtship

Bluebird courtship has been described by many as an act of "gentle beauty". Through singing and tail and wing displays, the male urges the female, upon her return, to explore the cavity he has shown her. The male will show the female several sites, and hopefully, she will choose one of them. During this time, the male courts the female through warblings and offerings of choice insects. If the female declines his choice, the male will continue to search for a more suitable nesting site. If she approves, the female accepts him as her mate and the pair will then stay close by until nest building begins.

Nest Building

Nest building may start right away, or the pair may wait up to 6 weeks. The female builds the nest almost entirely by herself. However, the male will accompany her while she collects the nesting material. The 3-4 inch wide nest is made of woven grasses and sedges. It usually takes 5-6 days for the nest to be completed.

