Biennial 2015 Fall Conference

Current and Past Presidents of VBS: From left to right, Cathy Hindman, Anne Little, Carmen Bishop, and Julie Kuttruff with Bruno the bluebird “mascot”.

In November 2015, the VBS Fall conference took place in Charlottesville with 85 attendees. There was a photo presentation from Bob Schamerhorn of www.iphotobirds.com about attracting birds with water. We learned we are citizen scientists from Dr. Caren Cooper of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and how our note taking and data collection is valued. We enjoyed more beautiful photos from Bill Young and listened to 99 reasons to be fascinated by birds. There were displays and books and door prizes and food! We enjoyed the comradery of bluebirders from all over the state and beyond. We elected new board members and presented awards. It was a productive and enjoyable day for all. Those who attended look forward to the next in 2017.
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If you have a new e-mail address, or have recently changed it, please let us know.

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Bird Box Editor

Vacancy! Help needed!

We welcome your written items and artwork (photos and drawings) for The Bird Box.
Contact: Cathy Hindman

Bird Box Soul

Come inside, rest.
The hammer's still,
a life's work done.
Blue feathers carry your last breath
and bring you back
whenever we were before.
The last bird box hangs empty,
a life fledged
on a legacy of wings.

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Candy Castellanos

VBS Memoriam

Nest Boxes in memory of the following members were given at the fall conference.

Tom Clifton, Salem Va

In 1999 Tom became interested in bluebirds and he set up his wood shop to produce nest boxes and make them available to anyone who wanted a box. Known as the "Bluebird Man", by 2008 Tom was maintaining 750 nest boxes on bluebird trails in six counties. During this period in Roanoke County, 76-percent of the 363 nest boxes on 18 county trails were donated by Tom. By 2014 Tom estimated that he had produced well over 1,200 nest boxes which fledged thousands of bluebirds. Earl Morris accepted a memorial nest box in memory of Tom. The box will be installed at Garst Mill Park which was one of Tom’s favorite bluebird trails

Jimmy Doyle, Henry County - A Pioneer in Bluebird Conservation

Jimmy Doyle was an advocate for the local bluebird population for the past 36 years and served as acting County Coordinator for Henry County for most of those years. Jimmy maintained 45 boxes on a 7 mile bluebird trail that extended from Mulberry Road to Chatmoss Country Club. His efforts over the past years have made a significant impact in the bluebird population across Martinsville and Henry County. He erected and monitored nest boxes all around the area and his efforts were focused on teaching other people how to take care of the bluebirds. A memorial nest box was accepted by Carole Doyle in memory of her husband.
VBS Awards Ceremony November 2015
By Anne Little

Our volunteers are the life-blood of VBS. Our members' work is done away from the limelight, in the quiet company of nature. We realize that extra effort deserves recognition and that is why we have awards to applaud their hard work.

Jan Lockwood & Lois Ulman: Barbara Chambers Memorial County Coordinator of the Year - This award is given in memory of Barbara Chambers and the energy and inspiration she brought to bluebird conservation. This award is given to a county coordinator who goes the extra mile to organize, inspire and further bluebird conservation in their county.

Lois and Jan are a great team. They are responsible for three areas: James City (7 trails with 148 boxes), Williamsburg City (1 trail with 20 boxes), and York County (5 trails with 88 boxes). They exhibit the drive and enthusiasm to lead others in a positive, fun way. Jan and Lois have done this for many years.

Christine Boran nominated them for this award with these words, “They are hardworking, communicate well with their monitors and are willing to try new ideas to make their trails better. They are willing to try anything to help the bluebirds!”

Ron & Priscilla Kingston: VBS “Heritage Award” - This award is not given every year by our organization. It recognizes an individual who has been a long time bluebirder. This is a special person who lives and breathes bluebirds, and has spent many years promoting bluebirds and the love of bluebirds.

Ron and Priscilla became involved with bluebirds when they heard Dr. Zeleny give a presentation in 1978. While they lived in northern Virginia they established a number of bluebird trails including Huntley Meadows and Sky Meadows State Park. When Ron retired they moved to Ablemarle County and began establishing trails throughout the area and promoting bluebirds. Ron and Priscilla were active with NABS since the early days of NABS.

Ron was chair of the speaker’s bureau for many years and they were both in attendance at the annual NABS convention every year. They have volunteered for many, many years on all kinds of projects for VBS. You could count on them doing a stint at the state fair every year, nest box building workshops, and educational events. They have been a huge supporter of other cavity nesting birds as well – kestrels, owls, prothonotary warblers and purple martins. Ron and Priscilla have partnered with Lance Wood to hold the annual purple martin workshop in Albemarle County every year that attracts hundreds of people to learn about cavity nesting birds.

Ron developed the Kingston Stovepipe guard that has saved thousands of bluebirds from predation. Bluebirders all over the country use his design to protect their nest boxes.
**Clark Walter: Volunteer of the Year** – This award is given to an individual who helps promote and enhance VBS. By giving of their time and energy, this individual helps VBS and the bluebird to grow and flourish in VA.

Clark is extremely generous with his time and knowledge. Each fall he builds hundreds of bluebird houses, including the pole and baffle, and sells them to anyone who wants them, for the cost of his materials. He receives no remuneration whatsoever for his time - except for the joy and pleasure of encouraging bluebird populations and bluebird monitoring. Clark also will assist with installation of boxes that he builds and also gives educational programs.

Clark first became involved with bluebirds in 2012. Clark built all of his own boxes for his trail. Soon, by word of mouth, he was on his way to building nest boxes for others. That first year he built 91 boxes. He expanded his call for orders to include all local Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) members and others. As of February 2015, Clark had built 692 bluebird nest boxes. During Clark’s designated building months, his shop becomes a crowded, but well-organized, blur of activity. Over several weeks, Clark is a one-man, bluebird nest box assembly line. He also drives to Ohio where he gets a discount on the metal to construct baffles – a discount that is passed on to those who buy his boxes. Clark has also prepared an informational power point presentation which he will e-mail on request to any one with questions about set-up and nesting in general.

**Linda Drage: Bluebirder of the Year** – This award is given to the individual who promotes bluebirds through outreach to schools and community groups, promoting good bluebird management techniques, and helping others to love and care for the bluebird. Nominated by Dottie Haley, Henry County Coordinator, she writes, “Linda is a monitor in Henry County and is fairly new to monitoring. In 2014, she took over the Martinsville trail that had been built and monitored by Jimmy Doyle over the last 25 years. When Jimmy's health began to fail, Linda stepped up.

As the 2014 season progressed, the Martinsville boxes began to present an unusually high mortality rate. Linda was finding dead chicks as well as adult bluebirds on her weekly rounds and she quickly sprang into action. She called on the expertise of Christine Boran, State Coordinator for the VBS. Christine surveyed the trail with Linda and made numerous suggestions for upgrading the older boxes along the trail.

In order to secure funding for the upgrades, Linda drafted a letter for each homeowner who had a box on the Martinsville trail. Most of the boxes on the trial were old and did not have the guarding now recommended by VBS. Linda's letter writing campaign was a huge success. She collected a total of $480.00 and was able to purchase 16 complete new boxes from Clark Walter and replace some of the older boxes on the Martinsville trail.

Linda is very enthusiastic about all of her volunteer undertakings, and gives 150% to her bluebirds.
VBS Nest Box Activity 2015

By Ann Dunn, Data Manager

Our monitoring reports are in. Details of the results may be found in the attached table. This year we had 5312 nest boxes on 412 trails located in 45 counties and cities scattered throughout Virginia. We thank our very dedicated volunteers who monitored and maintained our trails throughout the breeding season.

The species distribution show some shifts this year (Figure 1). Bluebirds continue to be the primary species on our nesting trails throughout the state, but their relative dominance has fallen since 2013. This year they represented 57 percent of fledging birds, the lowest since 2005, while tree swallows accounted for a new high of 29 percent. In the East and Southeast regions (designates of the Virginia Society of Ornithology), Carolina chickadees have traditionally replaced tree swallows as the secondary species. In these regions tree swallow numbers remained low (< 5 percent) in 2015 while chickadees contributed a new high of 16 percent of fledging birds.

Figure 1. Species Distribution of Fledglings 2015

Figure 2 follows the fledging history of bluebirds and tree swallows over the past eleven years. The decline in fledging numbers by bluebirds, first seen in 2014, continued this past year and represents a 29 percent drop from the peak year of 2013. Tree swallow fledging numbers showed little change during this period.
Figure 3 compares several additional parameters of nesting activity for bluebirds (3A) and tree swallows (3B) in 2013 and 2015.

![Figure 3A. Nesting Activity 2013 and 2015 (Bluebirds)](image)

Bluebird nesting attempts during this period fell by 30 percent and fledging productivity (Fledglings/Box) by 35 percent while clutch size (Eggs/Nesting Attempts) declined slightly and nest survival (Fledglings/Eggs) remained steady. Bluebird losses were greatest within the East, Southeast and North regions of the state where both nesting attempts and fledging productivity were down by 45 percent from 2013 levels.

![Figure 3B. Nesting Activity 2013 and 2015 (Tree Swallows)](image)

During the same period tree swallow nesting attempts and fledging productivity increased by respectively 23 and 14 percent, but clutch size and nest survival fell by respectively 6 and 8 percent. In the East and Southeast regions where chickadees were second to bluebirds in nest box use, both their nesting attempts and fledging productivity increased by 45 percent, while clutch size and nest survival remained stable (results not shown).

By all indices bluebirds nesting activity in 2015 has continued to decline since 2013. Presumably weather patterns over the last three years have been a significant factor. The winter and spring of 2013 were unusually mild while the past two winters have been severe, followed by late/cool springs. Our resident breeding bluebirds, probably already in population decline after 2014, faced another condensed and cold breeding season which brought increased competition for nesting sites from secondary nesters and a reduced supply of needed protein-rich food for breeding vitality. Improvement in nesting productivity over the next couple of breeding seasons may be critical to keeping our Virginia bluebirds common. Let’s continue the good work, keeping those nestboxes intact and protected, the trails well maintained and monitored, all the while keeping careful and complete records of what we find. Numbers are essential to understanding what is happening to our beloved bluebirds and their fellow native cavity nesters.
Calendar Noteworthy:

March – Check boxes for any necessary repairs and clean out from winter roosting

April – Start monitoring all nest boxes

May – Deadline for newsletter submissions May 16

June 25th is the 22nd Annual Purple Martin Field Day in Louisa County

www.purplemartinfieldday.org

How To Join

Send your name, address, phone number and/or email address along with a check for $10 for an individual with e-mailed Newsletter ($15 for print Newsletter) or $15 for a family with e-mailed Newsletter ($20 for a print Newsletter) to:

Virginia Bluebird Society
726 William Street
Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Membership forms are available on the VBS website: http://www.virginiabluebirds.org