

## Welcome Back the Bluebird



**Supporting the return of North America's  
three bluebird species and other native  
cavity-nesting species since 1978.**



Female Eastern Bluebird  
Photo by Chuck Lajeunesse

**North American Bluebird Society  
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**[www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)  
[www.facebook.com/NorthAmericanBluebirdSociety](https://www.facebook.com/NorthAmericanBluebirdSociety)**

**The North American Bluebird Society**  
(NABS) is a tax-exempt 501.c.3 non-profit conservation, education and research organization that promotes the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species in North America.

NABS works to support educational and conservation programs, research on bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species, and to promote ideas and actions that enhance bluebird conservation. In cooperation with individuals and organizations continent-wide, NABS has made great strides toward restoring bluebird populations.



Male and female Western Bluebirds (note male's blue chin!)  
Photo by George Gentry, USFWS

Through its educational and informative quarterly Journal, *Bluebird*, NABS offers information on nestbox design, control of competitors and predators, and techniques for enhancing winter food supplies for bluebirds. Each issue of *Bluebird* is chocked full of stunning photos of bluebirds, articles about interesting bluebirding experiences, and the latest research findings on bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species. In an ongoing effort to promote and facilitate bluebird conservation, NABS also disseminates information about bluebirds and other native cavity-nesters through talks, workshops, conventions, media, a bluebirding hotline, and the NABS Facebook page and website.

### NABS Affiliate Program

NABS is an international organization, covering bluebird territories across North America from Canada to Mexico and Bermuda. There are also a number of active state, provincial and regional bluebird Affiliate organizations. To foster information sharing among these groups, NABS set up an affiliate program. NABS and the member groups enjoy the

free flow of ideas, information, and research. It is a mutually beneficial process that serves to strengthen and enhance the efforts of all participants. Please contact NABS for more information on how to become an Affiliate organization.



Male and female Mountain Bluebirds  
Photo by TJ in AZ (Flickr.com CC license)

### The Bluebird in North America

Bluebirds were once a common "country bird" in the United States. These birds flourish in open grassland spaces, and thus had benefited from clearing of the vast forest expanses with the settlement in the late 1700s. However, human activities subsequently began to have a negative impact on bluebirds. One devastating change was the introduction of two nonnative cavity-nesting species—the House (or English) Sparrow and the European Starling—in the 1800s. These aggressive birds out-compete for cavities and even kill bluebirds. Changes in farming practices, including mechanization, land consolidation, and grassland-to-row crop conversions also contributed to a loss of nesting sites for bluebirds. Finally, the widespread use of agricultural pesticides often impacted the supplies of insects needed to feed nestlings. As a result by the 1940s–50s, bluebird populations were plummeting and by the 1960s the bluebird was becoming a rare species over much of the Continent.

### Recovery of the Bluebird and the Birth of NABS

Fortunately in the 1960–70s individuals like NABS founder, Dr. Lawrence Zeleny, and others recognized the increasing rarity of bluebirds and endeavored to save the species by providing artificial (man-made) nesting boxes designed just for bluebirds. In 1977, Dr. Zeleny wrote a momentous article entitled "Song of Hope for the Bluebird," which was published in *National Geographic* magazine. The impact of this article was dramatic, resulting in a groundswell of public interest. Thousands of concerned citizens responded by letter and deed to Zeleny's call. The following year NABS was formed with Zeleny as its first president.

Since then, thousands of bluebirders have joined NABS and its affiliates to help bluebirds thrive once again. More and more people started putting up artificial bird houses (nest-

boxes) designed specifically for bluebirds. The bluebirding movement and provision of nestboxes also benefited other native cavity nesters like chickadees, swallows, wrens, and titmice. Bluebird populations in many areas have rebounded. But House Sparrow and European Starling threats remain and bluebirds will always be heavily dependent on artificial nestboxes and still desperately need your help!

Please help the bluebird conservation movement by joining NABS and learning how acquire, mount, and monitor your own bluebird nestboxes. Become a part of the team that preserves these beautiful and charismatic birds.

### How to Become a "Bluebird Landlord"

Getting started with bluebirding is not hard but does require learning the right practices so that you do not end up doing harm rather than good. There are three elements to successful bluebirding. The first would be to locate proper habitat—there is little point to putting up a nestbox in places where bluebirds do not go. Bluebirds are primarily insectivores and thus prefer open areas with low-cut grass and a few trees interspersed. Typical examples of good bluebird habitat are mowed grasslands, pastures, rural roadsides, open areas in parks, golf courses, orchards, vineyards, and cemeteries. This habitat provides bluebirds with a ready supply of insects, spiders, larvae, and other invertebrates to feed their young.



Bluebird nestbox made of Western Red Cedar. Note roof overhangs front and sides. This helps keep out rain and sun. The box is located in good bluebird habitat and is mounted on electrical conduit with a stovepipe baffle and a Noel guard (made of hardware cloth) to safeguard against raccoons and rat snakes.  
Photo by Christine Boran

The second element for success is to buy or make a proper nestbox and then mount it in a manner that will assure that the nest is secure from predators and will permit the bluebirds to successfully complete a reproductive cycle. The NABS website outlines the features of a good bluebird nestbox. There are many features to consider and many types of nestboxes (of varying quality) offered for sale. Ideal nestbox construction material is wood that resists water damage (e.g., red cedar or redwood) or exterior-grade plywood. If the box is constructed from pine or regular plywood the nestbox will last a lot longer if it is painted a light earth-tone or white color using exterior latex paint. Never paint the inside of the box or the door. Do not use pressure-treated woods as these contain toxic materials like creosote or pentachlorophenol.

Several important features to look for in a nestbox are (1) A large roof that ideally overhangs the front (4–6 inches) and sides (1–3 inches) and it is even better if the roof overhangs the back of the box as well. (2) The nestbox should have a front or side door that opens easily to permit monitoring the chicks. It should be possible to secure the door from opening when not monitoring. (3) The bottom of the box should have at least 15–25 square inches of area and the entrance hole should be at least 5–6 inches above floor of the nestbox. (4) If your nestbox is in an area that experiences high summer temperatures (above 90-95°F) for extended periods it is important to have adequate ventilation—if temperatures inside the box exceed 105°F the eggs will cook. (5) Rain can often get in the air ventilation holes especially if there is not adequate roof overhang. In such cases small (1/4 inch) holes should be drilled in the floor to permit water to drain.

Proper (i.e., safe) mounting is just as important as the correct nestbox selection. A proper mount is the most important element for keeping predators such as raccoons or snakes from getting to the box and preying on the eggs or the chicks within. Small-diameter electrical conduit or metal pipe generally makes ideal poles. Mounting nestboxes on wooden poles, fence posts, or a tree is not recommended. If your area has predators like raccoons or rat snakes then a predator guard (e.g., a baffle, or raccoon guard) is necessary regardless of what kind of pole is employed. Mountain and Western bluebirders are often able to safely mount nestboxes on wooden fence posts. Nestboxes for Western Bluebirds are often successfully hung from tree limbs. The mounting approach used for your nestbox is dictated by predators faced in your area.

The third important element for successful bluebirding is to learn how to properly monitor your nestbox(es). From the time a bluebird pair “claims” a nestbox and builds a nest until eggs are laid, then hatched, and the chicks are finally fledged many things can go wrong. Some things, such as very cold, dry, or hot weather cannot be avoided. But there are many other problems that can be addressed like rain getting into the nestbox, infestations (e.g., blowflies or fire ants), attacks by predators (snakes, raccoons, or hawks), House Sparrow competition, or a host of other things. But proper nestbox monitoring can often times facilitate intervention that



Male and female Eastern Bluebird (note male red chin)  
Photo by Kimberly Smith

can either solve or mitigate these issues to save the nest and result in successfully fledged young bluebirds.

One element of bluebirding that is not required but adds to the fun or enjoyment is to keep records on the species using your boxes, the number of attempted versus successful nests, the number of eggs, chicks, and finally fledged. This information may help you determine what works best and is information that can be very useful to citizen science projects like the Cornell University's NestWatch program. Many state and local bluebird societies also keep productivity records and would probably very much like to have your data.

## Getting Help on the Bluebird Trail

In addition to the web site NABS also offers informative “facts sheets” that cover all aspects of bluebirding. The fact sheets are comprehensive 2–4 page, full color documents that can be downloaded in PDF format from the website. In addition if questions or problems occur during the nesting season NABS provides a hotline that is available every day for direct assistance with a problem. Likewise, the NABS Facebook site is a great place to get answers from knowledgeable bluebirders who are likely to have already experienced practically any problem that one might typically encounter. The web site Sialis ([www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org)) is another comprehensive bluebird facts site with advice on nearly any bluebirding problem that you might encounter.

## Why Join NABS?

By joining NABS, you can become part of the effort to conserve bluebirds. From its founding, NABS has monitored bluebird populations, directed and fostered the bluebird conservation movement by developing educational and con-

servation programs, and funded scientific research directed to bluebird conservation.

Join this effort with your membership support, your ideas, and your enthusiasm! By joining you become part of one of North America's most successful grassroots conservation movements. Three species of bluebirds have been saved from continent-wide extirpation and no government has spent money to accomplish it. Bluebirds have been saved through a labor of love and sacrifice by members of NABS and its Affiliates. Become part of this great story!

To Join NABS please complete the membership form on the back of this pamphlet.

Your NABS membership provides you with the following: A subscription to the NABS quarterly journal *Bluebird*, an engaging publication combining informative articles on the status of bluebirds and on new methods for helping bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting species, reports on the latest scientific research dealing with bluebirds (and other cavity-nesting species), as well as interesting stories about the experiences of other bluebirders, in addition to stunning photographs of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds.

Each new member receives a set of fact sheets and the plans for bluebird nestboxes, information on how to set up your own bluebird trail, and how to access expert advice in dealing with problems you may encounter along your bluebird trail through the website, Bluebird hotline, and the NABS Facebook page.



Bluebird nest with eggs and just-hatched chicks  
Photo by Christine Boran

## NABS Membership Form

New Membership       Renewal  
(If this is a renewal include your NABS membership ID# \_\_\_\_\_)

Gift Membership from: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal address of new member—you will receive the *Bluebird* journal at this address:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State/Province \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

An online membership form with payment via PayPal is available at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)

Check enclosed (USD \$ only)

Visa     Mastercard

Card#: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_ (mm/yy) CVV 3-digit code \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Levels

Circle one:    1 Year    2 Years    3 Years    4 Years

Subscribing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$40
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$85	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75
Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/> \$110	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500

Organization    \$50

Small Business    \$50

Corporation    \$125

A+    \$15 (one year, one-time introductory membership offer to Affiliate members only)

Affiliate name: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Donation:     \$30     \$25     Other \_\_\_\_\_

How did you learn about NABS? \_\_\_\_\_

**(We do not sell/share the NABS membership list)**

Mail application and remittance (USD only \$) to:

**NABS**  
P.O. Box 7844  
Bloomington, IN 47407