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Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

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Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

Background Information

Common throughout Connecticut in the early to mid-1800s, the Eastern Bluebird, one of the most loved and beneficial birds, declined in numbers from the late 1800s through the 1980s. One significant contributing factor to this decline was the lack of suitable nesting cavities needed by the bluebird to successfully raise young. This lack of nesting cavities resulted from changing land use patterns and increasing urbanization. Competition for nesting cavities from introduced European starlings and house sparrows, the loss of open field habitats, pesticide use, and severe weather conditions have also played a role in the decline of bluebird populations.

The construction of nest boxes and establishment of nest box "trails" in appropriate habitat is helping the bluebird make a comeback. Proper construction and placement of nest boxes will encourage bluebirds and not their alien competitors.



FEEDBACK

Description and Field Marks

Eastern Bluebirds are small members of the thrush family, measuring from six to eight inches in length. They have large eyes, round heads, and slender, straight bills which are wide at the base.

The Eastern Bluebird is the only bluebird species found in New England. Mountain and Western Bluebirds are found west of the prairie states. The male Eastern Bluebird has a bright blue back and reddish-brown breast, sides, and flanks. The underparts are white. The coloration of the female is similar, although paler and more muted than that of the male. Juvenile bluebirds are grayish, with brown and white spots on the back and breast; only the wings and tail show any blue.

During the breeding season, as part of the courtship display, males may flutter the tips of their long, pointed wings after landing. Bluebirds have a squat appearance when perched.

The song is a sweet, melodious whistling and the call is a rising "chur chur-lee chur-lee." Both sexes may sing, although male bluebirds are most often heard singing from their nesting territories early in the breeding season. Bluebirds also utter a variety of short call notes.

Habitat

Birds of semi-open habitat, bluebirds prefer orchards, parklands, meadows, and other areas with scattered trees and short ground cover. They perch in the open, scanning the ground for their prey of insects and spiders. In the fall and winter, their diets change to wild fruits and berries. Small flocks of bluebirds may be seen foraging along the edges of wooded swamps. During fall migration, dogwood and viburnum berries are very important foods. Typical winter foods are the fruits of Virginia creeper, eastern red cedar, sumac, bayberry, honeysuckle, winterberry, and many other berry-producing shrubs and vines.

Breeding

Bluebirds search for natural cavities or nest boxes along the edges of woods or pastures, and in orchards, meadows, and large gardens. Hollow limbs, holes in trunks, or deserted woodpecker "apartments" are used as nest sites. These cavities range from three to 30 or more feet above ground. Competition with starlings for these natural cavities often forces bluebirds to seek nest boxes. The nest, built by the female, is composed chiefly of grass, but often contains fine rootlets, pine needles, or deer hair. The three to seven eggs are oval and light blue in color. White eggs are possible, but rare. Eggs are laid from early April to mid-August in Connecticut. Incubation, done mostly by the female, normally takes 13 to 14 days, but can take longer in cold weather. Bluebirds produce two broods yearly, and sometimes three if weather conditions are favorable and food supplies are adequate.

Distribution in New England

Bluebirds are both migrants and summer residents in New England. They may be winter residents in southern New England, and they are becoming more common year-round in certain areas of Connecticut.

Parasites