

TYPICAL BLUEBIRD NESTING TIMETABLE

February & March

Bluebirds start looking for "breeding real estate" that contains a nesting cavity or nest box, water, large grassy areas that are open which hold a potential for food (insects mostly, but also berries) along with suitable perches and shelter.

March 15 - 17

Male bluebird locates a nesting site and tries to induce the female bluebird to accept his chosen nesting site.

March 17

Female accepts the site. In doing so, she is accepting the male as her mate.

March 17 - April 8

"Honeymoon" period: the bluebird pair remain in the vicinity of the nesting site, frequently examines it going in and out of the box, poking their heads in and out of the hole and perching on the box. It is almost as if they are "practicing" for parenthood.

April 9 - 13

Female bluebird builds a nest of either fine grasses or pine needles. The male provides her much "encouragement" and may make frequent "inspections" of her progress.

April 14 - 18

Pair remains in the general vicinity of the nest

April 18 - 22

Egg laying takes place. Usually this is done first thing in the morning and one egg is laid each day for 4 - 6 consecutive days. Usually the eggs are blue but occasionally they are white.

April 22 - May 6

Incubation period: the female incubates the eggs for fourteen days while the male remains close by, often bringing food to the female. He guards the nest while the female is out for food and exercise.

May 6th

Eggs hatch and the female will either eat the busted shells or carries them away. Eating the shells help her replenish calcium.

May 6 - 23 Female will brood the young babies for 5 - 7 days (for shorter periods of time each day) until they are old enough to regulate their own body temperature. Both adults work tirelessly from dawn to dusk to feed the nestlings.

May 23

Nestlings grow quickly and the nest box can get pretty crowded. They start coming to the hole and poking their heads out to be fed. Eventually, they get up the nerve to leave the nest. Generally, they fly directly to a tree, shrub, fence or other nearby perch on their first flight. Some only fly a few feet, others fly many yards.

May 24 - 30

Both parents continue to devote full time to the feeding and protection of the young. They usually stay in the general vicinity of the nesting site but seek out areas that have more cover for the young fledglings. Sometimes they will retreat to a wooded area with an open field nearby.

May 31 - June 4

Female builds a new nest for the second brood, often (but not necessarily) in the same cavity or nest box. The male continues to feed and protect the young of the first brood.

June 8 - 11

Egg laying for the second brood (typically one egg each day for four or 5 consecutive days) takes place.

June 11 - 24

Incubation period: the incubation period usually lasts 13 - 14 days. The young of the second brood remain in the nest and are constantly fed by the parents.

The first brood of bluebirds become independent but stay nearby for as long as the parents will allow them to. Sometimes they will help raise the second brood. If they don't, they are chased off to "find their own territory".

June 24 - July 11

Nestlings of the second brood fledge. (The nesting season may end here, but sometimes a third brood may be raised as described below).

July 17 - 22

Female bluebird builds a new nest for the third brood and the whole process gets repeated.

In The Fall & Winter

As the days become shorter and cooler bluebirds start to form loose flocks with other bluebirds but also with other birds as well. They rarely go more than 50 miles from the place of their birth or breeding grounds as long as there is adequate food, water and shelter. Bluebirds will use cavities and nestboxes to roost during the winter months. Sometimes they roost together in the same box or cavity in large numbers.

