

# IOU Activity Booklet



## Monitoring Bluebird Boxes

**Procedure:** MONITOR BOXES AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK!

After you have built your boxes and mounted them, **monitor the boxes once a week**. Divide the responsibility of monitoring the trail among your class members. Recruit a leader, a parent, or responsible student to be in charge of the project. Getting a pair of bluebirds to use your box is the hardest part. Check with local bluebird enthusiasts for an area where bluebirds are known to frequent. Once you spot nest building occurring, try to determine whose nest it is. Observe what type of bird is flying in and out. If this is not possible, here are several hints to identify bluebird nests.

Bluebird nests are built almost entirely of dry grasses and are neatly arranged. House sparrow nests are made of weeds, grasses, and straw. They are very messy and often fill up the nest box. House wren nests are built of twigs. Tree swallow nests are often made of grasses, and the cup has feathers in it. Black-capped chickadee nests often have moss in them. and mouse nests are rolled into a big ball.

Bluebird eggs are light blue. They are rarely speckled. Sometimes bluebird eggs can be white. House sparrow eggs are smaller and usually speckled.

House sparrows are stubborn nesters. Their nest and eggs should be cleaned out regularly. House sparrows are not protected by law.

If you determine you have bluebirds nesting, the box needs to be monitored weekly. Observe the nest box from a distance while the birds are making their nest. After the nest has been completed and the eggs are laid, you may open the box and take a quick look. Try to make your observations quickly. It is a good idea to tap on the side of the box before opening it to let the female bluebird fly out. Sometimes she will sit tightly on the nest, and you will have to come back later. Use the form to record the data.

Both parents take turns incubating the eggs for two weeks. The eggs hatch almost all at once, and the adults begin to search for food for the young birds. Usually bluebirds can not fly until they are about 20 days old. It is best not to open the nest box after their twelfth day to prevent premature fledging. It is important to record the dates when the eggs are laid and hatched, how many eggs are laid, and how many hatch.

Nest box predation is a problem. Enemies of the bluebird are house sparrows, starlings, raccoons, cats, snakes, and blackflies. The house sparrow is the worst avian enemy of the bluebird. Sparrows will kill adults, as well as the babies, and take over the box. If the eggs disappear, the culprit is often a snake. Raccoons and cats will reach in and tear up the nest and kill the babies. Printer's tin on the post or automobile grease applied to a pole every week will help cut down on the climbing predators. Cats have been known to sit on top of a box and catch the adult bluebirds as they fly in and out. Blowflies and blackflies can infest the nest and the young nestlings, often killing the young birds. Contact a local bluebirder if you have persistent predation problems.

## Activity Sheet: Bluebird Box Results

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of box: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of bluebird houses monitored

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of houses occupied by bluebirds

\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of bluebird eggs laid: \_\_\_blue \_\_\_white

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of bluebird young hatched

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of bluebirds presumed fledged or flown from the nest

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of successful bluebird nesting attempts in occupied boxes

Number of boxes with:

\_\_\_ one nest \_\_\_ two nests \_\_\_ three nests

\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of bluebird eggs laid

Number of nest boxes occupied by \_\_\_ house sparrows \_\_\_ starlings

\_\_\_ house wrens \_\_\_ tree swallows \_\_\_ chickadees \_\_\_ others

Please list other species of birds found nesting in the boxes.

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