



Monitoring Bluebird Nest Boxes

Procedure #1
Updated February 2024

Monitoring for the Bella Vista Bluebird Society is a commitment that should be taken seriously by all monitors. Monitors are the heart of the Society. In addition to providing the work required for caring for bluebirds, monitors are the people most observed by the public.

1) Monitor your trail every 7-9 days throughout the nesting season. Plan on monitoring every 7 days but make 9 days the maximum. Those eggs hatch fast, and the chicks grow fast. Past 9 days allows chicks to fledge and you are not sure they did. If you'll be unable to do your boxes for any reason, and don't have a sub, contact the BVBBS President or Monitor Coordinator, or your assigned Trail Boss. Any of them will be glad to step in to monitor your box.

2) Record all nest box activity on your monitoring sheet. Include all bird species, not just bluebirds. Use the codes given at the bottom of your sheet so that anyone viewing your sheet understands what you have seen in each box. Timely and accurate monitoring helps us determine what boxes need to be moved, twinned, etc. (The [NABS Factsheet: Monitoring Bluebird Nestboxes](#) is an excellent resource for identifying bird nests & eggs.)

3) Clean out each box after chicks have fledged. Dispose of nests in a heavily wooded area, a trash box or take them home for disposal. Be sure to clean out the box at the end of the season.

4) Tools you need are minimal. Paper/pen or phone/tablet to record what you see in each box; several bags for nest disposal; a scraper/putty knife and/or paint brush for removing nests, cleaning out the box, and knocking down wasp nests; bar soap for wasp nest prevention and extra nails in case your box is missing its closure. All of these items can be carried in a bag. See [Procedure #3 – Nest Box Pests](#) for more information on dealing with nest box pests.

SUBSTITUTE MONITOR:

The nesting season for bluebirds corresponds with vacation season for humans, and there are times when a monitor will be away for 2-3 weeks. This is to be expected, but the bluebird nesting goes on, and so must the monitoring.

1) Select another monitor from your trail or any other trail. You sub for them, they sub for you. You can find the name of other monitors on the BVBBS roster.

2) Get your selected sub involved ASAP. In most cases, they will not know your trail and it would be good to have them go with you on the last day you monitor.

3) If a sub is not available, contact the BVBBS President or Monitor Coordinator, or your assigned Trail Boss.

RESPECTFUL MONITORING ON GOLF COURSES:

The BVBBS has had a good relationship with the POA since 1980. This is important to us since most of our boxes are located on POA property. To further this relationship, please observe the following guidelines when monitoring on a golf course.

- 1) Call the pro shop ahead of time to make sure a golf cart is available. When you get a cart, tell them you are with the Bluebird Society. Return the cart in a timely manner, having cleaned out any items you placed in the cart. If you walk your trail, do so on the least busiest time.
- 2) Remember that we are guests on the golf courses and should respect the golfers. Avoid noise and cart movement when a golfer is hitting or putting. Stop at a reasonable distance away from golfers and wait as long as any golfer is hitting or putting.
- 3) Respect the club rules regarding carts, just as you would as a golfer.
- 4) After clearing the nests from boxes, dispose of them away from the course. Take them to a trash box or put them in a bag & take them home for disposal.
- 5) Plan on monitoring at the least busiest times. This is a safety issue for your benefit and minimizes our interference with the golfers.
 - Maintenance days
 - Late afternoons
 - Early mornings

Click on this link for [Golf Course Schedules](#) for Maintenance Schedules, Group Play and Today's Play. If in doubt, or for more information, you can call the [golf course](#).

BIRDS THAT USE BVBBS NEST BOXES:

From most to least common

- Eastern Bluebird
- Tree Swallow
- Carolina Chickadee
- House Wren
- Tufted Titmouse
- Carolina Wren
- House Sparrow – destructive, invasive species that we do not allow to nest in our boxes

See [Eggs, Chicks, Birds](#), for information on the timing of bluebird eggs and chicks, and photos of the eggs and nests of birds that use bluebird nest boxes.

MONITORING TIPS/BEST PRACTICES:

- Monitor your boxes the same day of the week every week
- Check your sheet for the previous week's findings so you know what to expect when you open a box
- Record findings while standing by the box (it's surprising how quickly we can forget what we saw in which box)
- If the female is sitting on the nest, leave the door open & step back so she can fly out and you can record what she's sitting on
- If you have older chicks in the box, carefully open the door so they don't fly out prematurely
- If you had eggs the previous week, and have no eggs the next week, the nest has been invaded. Clean out the nest and mark **NI** on your worksheet.

- If you had very tiny young chicks the previous week, and an empty nest the next week, the nest has been invaded. Clean out the nest and mark **NI** on your worksheet.
- If a nest has been in the box for over 21 days and never used, you need to remove the nest and mark AB (Abandoned Nest) on your worksheet
- If eggs have been in a nest for over 21 days and never hatched, you need to remove the nest and mark AB (Abandoned Nest) on your worksheet
- For the last two items, make sure you identify the bird species on your worksheet

For more information on nest invasions, see [Procedure #3 - Nest Box Pests](#) and [Troubleshoot Guide](#). Contact your trail boss or [BVBBS President](#) with questions or problems.