

## The Importance of Keeping Good Records

- Keeping good records is critical to keeping the other trail monitors on your team well informed.
- It serves as a history of the trail from year to year so that we can track trends.
- It will also give you the information you need as monitors to know when critical dates are approaching so that you do not open the box during the critical “pre-fledging” period.
  - Try to know the day the last egg was laid. Knowing this will tell you when incubation started, enabling you to estimate the hatching date.
    - Bluebirds lay 4 to 5 eggs, one each day for 4 –5 days. The female begins incubating the eggs the day after the last egg was laid so that they’ll hatch all at once. Average incubation period is 13 to 21 days.
  - After the eggs hatch, the young will grow and develop. NEVER open the box after the 13<sup>th</sup> day after hatching. Young bluebirds startle easily and if they fledge from the nest before they are ready, you may be able to capture them and put them back in the nest but they will continue to try to jump out. If this does occur, place the young back in the nest, close the door and stuff a glove in the entrance hole for a few moments (no more than 30 minutes) until they hopefully settle down. It’s better to avoid this situation completely however and keeping good records will let you know when this fateful time period is approaching so that you will not open the box and cause a premature fledging.
  - The young will fledge 16 to 23 days after hatching. (Weather and availability of food will impact the fledging date). If after the 18<sup>th</sup> day they have not fledged then they probably will not fledge prematurely and it’s ok to peek in – but be sure of the dates!
  - Use a calendar and count backwards to make accurate estimates for the fledgling period.
  - Watch the nest for feeding activity – the adults will actively feed the young every 3-5 minutes during the last few days in the nest and the adults will feed the young from outside the box, not entering it.
- Good data provides accurate documentation of information that we report to the Virginia Bluebird Society which they compile for Virginia and send to North American Bluebird Society (NABS), Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO). We especially need:
  - Number of eggs
  - Number of chicks
  - Number of fledged (circle that number on your data sheets – often, we have to use the egg count)
  - Date of the first egg
  - Date of the first fledging