

JUNE 1 - 14, 2020 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES
By Dick Harlow

EASTERN BLUEBIRD



Eastern Bluebird, Male, *Sialia sialis*, EastView, Spring © Dick Harlow

As we were preparing to move into our newly purchased cottage in the spring of 2013, I believe I saw two bluebird families looking for a nest box. At that time there were only a few nest boxes close to the Inn and a pair of boxes between Kestrel Lane and Deer Meadow Drive. The pair between Kestrel and Deer Meadow were being sought after by Tree Swallows.

Understanding that EastView, at that time, was still a new construction there was little opportunity for birds to find nesting sites or nest boxes. When nest boxes were put up or when the boxes along the South Pond berm there became an opportunity for box nesters to vie for a nesting site.

The Eastern Bluebird is a member of the Thrush Family such as other bluebirds, robins and various species of thrushes.

The Eastern Bluebirds are considered very social except during the mating season when they can become quite territorial. If they have a favorite feeding area that is quite productive, they will extend that territorial behavior into the non-breeding season by protecting their feeding grounds against other bluebirds. But, generally during the off-season bluebirds will flock together in groups up to 100 birds or so. I have not seen that either here or elsewhere. Therefore, I think part of the reason for this is that our Eastern Bluebirds tend to migrate or move out of this area. We do see bluebirds during the winter, but they could very well be bluebirds from Canada and not the ones that nest here during the summer.

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Eastern Bluebird, Female, *Sialia sialis*, EastView,
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The majority of a bluebird's diet are invertebrates such as insects, spiders, beetles, earthworms and the like. While the remainder of its diet are various fruit types and berries. In times when winter berries are plentiful, bluebirds may tend to move less and shorten the distance of their Fall migration.

As parents, bluebirds are very caring and persistent in the protection of their young and the nest site. There are impediments to their success, however. Those impediments are English Sparrows, otherwise known as House Sparrows, Starlings, and snakes. The House Sparrows and Starlings, which are not native to America, will tend to nest early in the spring, earlier than when bluebirds begin to nest. Snakes on the other hand are after whatever is in the box at the time they enter it. If it is just the eggs, they will consume the eggs; if it is young and/or a parent they will consume them. This, along with preventing competition with squirrels and chipmunks is the reason you will see baffles on the poles below the nest box.

The female is the primary nest builder taking around 10 days to build her nest and she will lay between three to five and sometimes seven eggs in two broods a season. While incubating her eggs, which can take between 13 to 16 days to hatch, the male's responsibility is to catch food and feed it to the sitting female. Considering other nest box nesters, bluebirds are fastidious about keeping their nest box clean.

The young will fledge out between 15 and 20 days after hatching. Between a month to a month plus a week the brood will leave the nest. Yet it has been known that a few of the first brood will stay around after hatching to help with the rearing of the second brood.

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Eastern Bluebird eggs, © Wikipedia

Once the eggs hatch, then both parents cooperate fully to feed the young. The young's food is primarily of insects.

Banding of birds, i.e. putting a small metal band on the leg of a bird, gives ornithologists and biologists alike valuable information of a bird's travels, length of life and migratory information. A bluebird has been known to live as long as ten years. The lifespan of a bluebird is noted to be between six to ten years.

However, most bluebirds die their first year due to a number of, natural reasons; for example, they could starve, freeze, or have an unnatural death due to humans, or pet cats, natural predators such as falcons, owls, rodents, snakes, even bears and raccoons.

We can subscribe to hoping we see this very tough species, the Eastern Bluebird, successfully mate and raise a brood of young here at EastView.

ANSWER TO MAY 15-31 QUESTION



This fellow is feeding on Lilac flowers in middle/northern Vermont; therefore, it is considered a Canadian Tiger Swallowtail. Lilac flowers bloom either in late May or certainly by the first week in June. That time period is too soon for the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterflies to be in middle/northern Vermont.

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

- Eastern Coywolf
- Red Fox
- Gray Squirrel
- Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

REPTILES

- Garter Snake
- Milk Snake

AMPHIBIANS

- Leopard Frog
- American Bull Frog
- Gray Tree Frog

BUTTERFLIES

- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Silvery Blue
- Mustard White
- Canadian Tiger Swallowtail
- Pearl Crescent

Weather Tidbits

Month of JUNE 1-14, 2020

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 15.0 mm or 0.59 inches. Average June precipitation for Middlebury is 3.7 inches. We have a 3.1-inch deficit so far this month.

Overcast Days: 7