

Nesting Schedule

by Julie Zickefoose



Timetable for how long an average bluebird pair spends at each nesting stage:

Nest building:	1-6 days
Egg laying:	5-7 days
Incubation:	eastern— 12-14 days mountain— 13-15 days western— 14 days
Brooding:	6 days (all species)
Fledging:	eastern— day 16-21 mountain— day 19-23 western— day 19-22

In some cases, you may not know the hatch date of the young, and may need to estimate their age. This table gives you some guidelines:

Day 1:	Bright coral-pink skin, eyes sealed, down in sparse tufts.
Day 2-4:	Wings, head, spine look bluish due to developing feathers under skin.
Day 5-7:	Feather sheaths begin to emerge on wings. Eyes still closed.
Day 7:	First feathers burst from tip of sheaths. Eyes open as slits. Brooding by female stops.
Day 8-11:	Eyes fully open. Feathers continue to burst sheaths.
Day 11-12:	Feathers of wing and tail reveal cobalt blue in males, duller gray-blue in females. Female eastern bluebirds show white edging on outer tail feathers.
Day 13:	Cut-off date for box checks. Fully feathered young become increasingly active, and may fledge prematurely if box is opened.
Day 14-22:	Fledging and first flight. Empty nest soiled, flattened. Young remain in cover while parents bring food.
Day 28 on:	Fledglings fly strongly, following parents who feed them.
Day 30 on:	Fledglings feed unassisted.

Try to keep written records. Even if you monitor a single box, it's good to keep records and not trust your memory. It's important to know how old the young are to avoid causing premature fledging by opening the box after Day 13. Styles of record-keeping differ, but you'll want to record the following:

Date:	Weather, time.
Nest:	Note inches of material, whether cup is lined, condition after fledging.
Eggs:	Number, whether warm.
Young:	Number, age (count hatch day as Day 1) condition.
Parasites:	Type, any measures taken.
Fledglings:	Number, date of fledging if known, post-fledging sightings.
Comments:	Presence of adults, competitors, behavioral notes, other observations.