

## Typical Timeline for Eastern Bluebirds Nesting in Florida

Knowing what to expect and keeping accurate records of what is occurring inside a bluebird nestbox help play an important role in maintaining a successful trail. This information is important for two reasons:

1. Knowing what to expect helps alert the monitor to anything unusual happening inside the nest box; and.
2. Knowing the nesting timeline allows the monitor to know the approximate hatch date, the age of the nestlings and the expected fledge date.

### WHAT TO EXPECT IN FLORIDA

- Nest building frequently is underway in February; this may range from a few pine needles in the bottom of a box in mid-February to a completed nest by the end of February. By March most active boxes will have completed nests.
- Building a completed nest usually takes about five days, with reports ranging from one or two days to six days.
- The female usually begins laying eggs about one week after the nest is completed.
- The female normally lays one egg a day, usually in the morning, until the complete clutch is laid. The usual clutch size is five eggs, although it sometimes as many as seven, or as few as three. Clutch sizes tend to decrease during second and third nestings.
- It is not unusual for bluebirds to have three nestings during the season.
- The female usually does not begin incubating the eggs until the last one is laid.
- Incubation generally takes between 13 and 16 days, with 14 days being the average.
- The female bluebird has a brood patch on the breast. This is a bare patch of skin which transfers her body heat to the eggs she is incubating.
- Because the female begins incubating all the eggs at the same time they all usually hatch with one or two days of each other.
- Bluebird chicks are altricial, meaning they are born helpless. They cannot feed themselves and for the first five to seven days the female broods the chicks to keep them warm.
- If anything happens to the female during the first five to seven days so she cannot brood the chicks, they most likely will die. After that time it is possible that the male can raise the chicks alone, if there is sufficient food available for them.
- The nestlings usually fledge – leave the nest box – approximately 16 to 21 days after hatching, with 18 days usually being the average.
- Eyes on the nestlings usually begin opening when they are about eight days old and usually are fully open when 11 days old. This is a good guide to the age of the nestlings.
- The nest box should not be opened when the nestlings are 13 or more days old in order to prevent premature fledging.