

# The Florida Bluebird Society

Dedicated to the Protection  
And Conservation of Bluebirds in Florida



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## Mealworms help attract bluebirds To nest boxes; usage should be limited

By  
Cheri Martin-Spray,  
President,  
Florida Bluebird Society

At our recent library presentations, here in Citrus County, the question of feeding mealworms was brought up at each presentation.

So, should we feed our bluebirds mealworms, or not?

Well, they DON'T need them. However, mealworms are loaded with protein, which can be beneficial during nesting season. BUT....feeding too many mealworms can deplete calcium. This could result in the shell of the eggs being softer than normal. And also, the chick's bones could be weaker than normal.

According to Bet Zimmerman Smith, of [sialis.org](http://sialis.org), you can feed 15-20 worms per bird, per day, and it shouldn't be a problem. If you feed more than that amount, then you should supplement the diet with calcium carbonate, or calcium citrate powder.

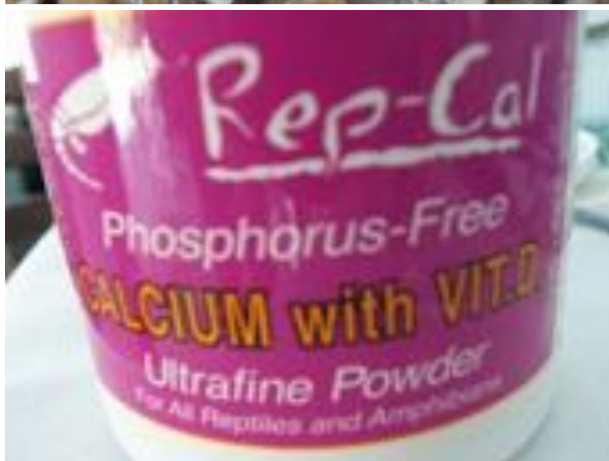
This can be purchased at your local pet store. It is something that is given to reptiles, so it is pretty easy to find. Just "dust" your mealies in the calcium powder before placing in your

*Continued on Page 02*

See related photos on Page 02 and related story in "Notes from the nest box" on Page 05.

Photo of bluebird eating mealworms taken with "Go-Pro" in backyard of Cheri Martin-Spray, President, Florida Bluebird Society





Mealworms with calcium supplement and container showing type of calcium available for bluebirds.

## Monitors Urged to follow FBS Principles, Protocols

With the new bluebird nesting season in full swing, individuals monitoring nest boxes might want to review the Principals and Protocols adopted by the Florida Bluebird Society.

The Principals and Protocols for Monitoring Bluebird Nest Boxes were adopted by the FBS board members after long discussions and careful consideration of what is best for the birds. While some individuals are tempted to make “pets” out of their bluebirds, the FBS stresses that while bluebirds are a source of enjoyment for many people, they are and should remain “wild and free” creatures.

The Principals and Protocols also adhere to the Scientific Collecting Permit issued to the FBS by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation. In adhering to existing state legal guidelines, the FBS’s General Birding Principles and Code of Ethics for Monitoring nest boxes may differ from practices publicized or advocated by the North American Bluebird Society, other state bluebird organizations, and on Internet web sites.

### PRINCIPALS

All individuals, and particularly members of the Florida Bluebird Society, should exercise a sense of responsibility in all interactions with birds. Realizing others learn

*Continued on Page 03*

*Continued from Page 01*

## Mealworms help attract bluebirds

mealworm feeder. It does not kill the mealies. I do this with the mealies I feed.

It is VERY important that the bluebirds hunt, and feed their young their native or wild diet.

For me, I enjoy feeding mealworms to the birds. It’s fun, and it allows for some great photo opportunities.

As with everything we do for our beloved birds, their safety and well-being should always come first. Place the mealworms in a feeder well away from the nesting box, so as not to attract predators,

or too much “traffic” in general, too close to their box.

I have seen photos of mealworms placed on the roof of the nest box. We do not recommend this.

Send us your photos of your blues enjoying some mealworms!

**DID YOU KNOW**— 68% of a bluebird’s diet is made up of insects: grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, spiders and caterpillars. They also like fruit , such as - flowering dogwood, holly, mulberry, wild grape, and — rarely – birdseed.

*Continued from Page 02*

## Monitoring of Nest Boxes “All About the Birds”

from example, members of the Florida Bluebird Society should adhere to the following principles:

— Always put the interest of the birds first. Be conscious of their welfare at all times as they are the highest priority.

— Consider the impact of all activities on the birds before taking action.

— Do all possible to ensure that nest boxes and other structures provided for birds are safe.

— Obey bird protection laws. Do not touch nests, eggs or birds.

— Keep disturbances to a minimum. Only open a nest box when necessary to collect data. Follow the Florida Bluebird Society’s Nest Box Monitoring Protocol.

— The Florida Bluebird Society’s Nest Box Monitoring Protocol has been distilled from a number of sources, including the North American Bluebird Society, Cornell Lab of Ornithology NestWatch Nest Monitor’s Code of Conduct, the American Birding Association Principles of Birding Ethics, state bluebird organizations, and web sites such as Sialis.org.

### **The Florida Bluebird Society’s Protocol seeks to adhere to two guiding principles:**

— The Florida Bluebird Society recognizes the need to provide nest boxes if there is to be a healthy population of Eastern Bluebirds in Florida.



Members of the Florida Bluebird Society will, as much as possible, confine their role to that of providing nest boxes and refrain as much as possible from assuming a caretaker role.

— The Florida Bluebird Society promotes the monitoring of nest boxes with minimal disturbance to help insure bluebird nesting activities remain as “natural” as possible, and that the bluebirds retain their “wild” status.

### **FLORIDA BLUEBIRD SOCIETY NEST BOX MONITORING PROTOCOL**

**Do All Possible To Ensure the Safety and Well-being of the Birds:**

The first principle of monitoring a nest box is that no observation should jeopardize the safety and well-being of the birds. All activities associated with the bluebird nesting box should be done as quickly, quietly and carefully as possible.

When monitoring nest boxes strive to avoid stressing the birds, and do everything possible to ensure the least amount of impact upon the birds. Monitoring activities must not jeopardize the nesting success of the birds. Everything the monitor needs to know can be obtained in a few minutes or less. When taking photographs, there is no reason to keep the nest box open for a prolonged period of time.

### **Plan Ahead to Minimize Disturbance:**

Nest boxes are monitored only for data collection. Planning is important to maximize monitoring efforts and to minimize time at the nest box.

Learn to identify the nests of different species. This will enable the monitor to know what to look for when opening the box.

Learn the normal time frame for the nesting events.

Plan a regular schedule of visits to the nest box in order to obtain an accurate record of the nesting events. Prepare in advance the field data sheets to record the information.

Move away from active nest boxes when recording the data to avoid unduly stressing the birds.

### **Caution is the Key**

—Monitors should make their presence known before opening the nest box. In many instances

*Continued on Page 04*

*Continued from Page 03*

## Monitors Urged to Follow Principles, Protocols



FBS Photo

**That's my house you're checking**

bluebirds will flush from the nest before the monitor arrives at the box. When this does not occur, lightly tap the side of the box before opening it very slowly. When opening the box stand to one side, not in front of the box. This will help prevent the monitor from being surprised by any “unusual” occupants of the box. It also will give an adult bird remaining on the nest the opportunity to safely fly out of the box. If the adult does not leave the nest, carefully close the box and leave the area.

### **Hands OFF**

When monitoring the nest box do not handle the bluebird nest, eggs, nestlings or parents during the

breeding season. In Florida, individuals who want to handle the bluebird nest or its contents during the breeding season need to possess the proper federal and/or state permits.

It is recommended that a mechanic's mirror or dental mirror be used to view the inside of the nest to count the eggs or nestlings. If unable to make an accurate count of the eggs or nestlings, indicate it is a minimum number rather than handle the nest contents.

Nest boxes should be cleaned out at the end of the nesting season and necessary repairs made during the off-season.

The nest boxes should be inspected again immediately prior to the start of a new nesting season to ensure that they are ready to be used by bluebirds.

English sparrows and starlings are not protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Act. They should be removed if found in a nest box.

House sparrows are small enough to enter a nest box through a 1½” entry hole and will destroy bluebird eggs. They will attack and kill both nestlings and adult birds trapped inside a nest box.

It is important to recognize the birds and nests protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Act and those non-native species which are not protected.

### **How Often and When?**

Nest boxes should be monitored at least once a week in order to obtain accurate data, to inspect and make any necessary repairs to the nest boxes, to determine the status of the nestlings and to avoid interfering with the natural nesting schedule of the chicks.

Monitoring weekly is sufficient to gather all the necessary information and to determine the status of the nest box and the chicks.

Regular monitoring also helps identify and address potential problems, such as house sparrows nesting in the nest box or fire ants nearby.

*Continued on Page 05*

*Continued from Page 04*

## Members of FBS Should Serve As “Model Monitors”

Nest boxes opened too frequently can cause a number of problems including:

- abandonment,
- Increased predation and
- premature fledging.

There also are certain times when nest boxes should not be opened. DO NOT OPEN when:

—nestlings are more than 12 days old.

This underscores the importance of regularly scheduled monitoring and the necessity for keeping accurate records of when the eggs are laid and hatch.

—it is raining in order to keep the nest from getting wet.

—the female is laying eggs during the early mornings.

In adhering to the above Nest Box Monitoring Protocol, members of the Florida Bluebird Society should serve as examples to other individuals who are interested in helping insure a brighter future for bluebirds in the Sunshine State.



## NEWS FROM THE NEST BOX

## A Sampling of Interesting Reports, Photos From Around The State

By  
Bill Pennewill  
Newsletter Editor

Bluebirds were “late bloomers” at the Penney Retirement Community (PRC), in Penney Farms, Clay County, outside Jacksonville, where I monitor 38 bluebird nest boxes. I was beginning to get a little envious of the reports being submitted by individuals who monitor nest boxes in more southern parts of the state.

Then, on March 9th, I found my first two eggs. They were in a box where the “sponsor” regularly puts out mealworms for “her” bluebirds. (Let me explain: As a means of raising funds to maintain the nest boxes, each season PRC residents are given the opportunity to sponsor a nest box. That box then becomes “their” nest box for that season.)

After reading Cheri’s article on bluebirds I wondered if putting out mealworms had any bearing on that nest box being the first to produce eggs.

But later that morning I also found two eggs in another box. That sponsor did not put out any mealworms.

So my rather unscientific conclusion based on the only two nest boxes in which eggs have been found so far is that the mealworms didn’t make any difference. What is interesting is that one nest box in a very open, sunny area on the golf course and the other box is in a shaded area in the yard behind a cottage. Two nest boxes with two completely different results.



Louis Nipper, FBS Board Member, e-mailed following report on March 3rd:

Have checked 252 nesting boxes. 140 empty. Bluebird nests — 67;

Carolina Chickadees nests 45;

Two Bluebird nests had 3 eggs each.

*Continued on Page 06*

*Continued from Page 05*

## Notes from the Nest Box; Interesting Reports, Photos

Received following e-mail report from Richard Gorges March 2nd:

**Subject:** Naples bluebirds

I put my first box up about this time last year. I had some lookers then but no takers. I first noticed a pair that was seriously interested in my house about 3 weeks ago. It took them (her) about a week to build their nest. I had checked the box about a week ago to confirm a nest but no eggs. On March 2nd I checked the box again and saw 3 eggs...The male is usually around appearing to be standing guard as we do have mockingbirds in the area that chase them around from time to time.

I put up a 2nd box about 2 weeks ago which has been frequented by another pair. No nest building as of now though.

I can't say I have a trail. Just the 2 boxes at this point. There is one other box up in our development that I'm going to volunteer to monitor. We'll see how that goes.

So, in summary, this is my first stab at blue-birding in Florida. I'm excited with the results so far. The boxes are on Palm trees which could become a problem. We have no pets in our development so no cats. I've seen



no snakes but a neighbor has seen a black racer. Keeping my fingers crossed on this as I can't put up a pole for the boxes that is recommended due to community mowing .

(Addendum—March 8 had 5 eggs; incubation on March 6)



Received following e-mail report from Kim Belvin, in Jacksonville, on March 6:

My bluebirds are already nesting - Five eggs !



Received following e-mail report from Claire Bannerman, of Water Sound, near Rosemary Beach, Walton County, March 10:

2 bluebirds, male and female arrived last week to nesting box on tree in backyard...They continue to dance around the box fly to and from pine trees and fence. Part of their dance is to cling to the round opening of the nest box.

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