

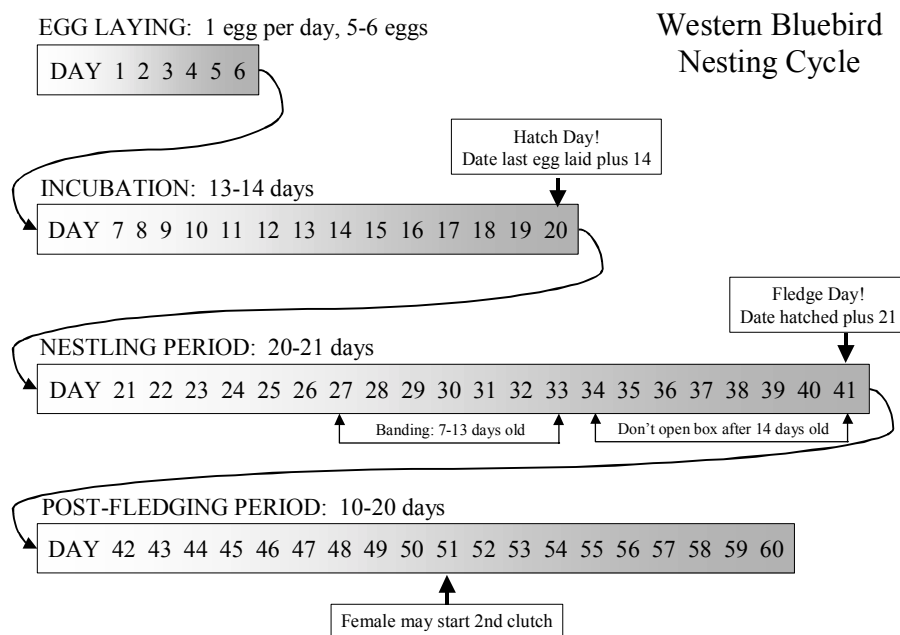
Nesting Activity

Introduction

The following sequence of events is typical of a successful bluebird-breeding season. Also included in this section are pictures of the nests of other species that use Prescott boxes and developing bluebird nestlings.

Nesting Cycle

These dates are approximations. The female may not start brooding immediately or nestlings may fledge a few days earlier or later than average.



Cavity selection	Western bluebirds in the Willamette Valley do not migrate. Many remain in their nesting territories throughout the winter and may be seen inspecting boxes as early as February. The adult male chooses a nesting cavity, often a Prescott nest box he has used in the past, and then attracts a female to form a pair bond for the breeding season.
Nest building	Bluebirds begin nest building between late March and mid-April. The female does all of the nest construction and can complete the task in as few as three days, or she may take two to three weeks.
Materials	Typically the female builds the nest with fine dry grass, three to five inches deep, at the bottom of the nest box. Sometimes she uses rootlets or other available vegetation. Bluebirds rarely use feathers in a nest, and the presence of feathers is a clue that another type of bird has built the nest, such as a swallow.
Egg laying	The female bluebird often begins egg laying for the first clutch in mid-April. She lays four to seven blue eggs, usually at one-day intervals. Rarely the eggs may be white. Laying one egg per day makes it easy for bluebird monitors to track the progress during this phase and to predict when egg laying is complete and incubation starts.

Nesting Activity

Incubation	Only the female incubates the eggs. She plucks feathers from her lower breast area to create a brood patch and maximize warmth on contact with the eggs and hatchlings. She usually begins incubation after the last egg is laid. The eggs remain viable until she starts brooding them, and then the embryos start developing at the same time.
Adult male role	In addition to claiming the nest box, the male defends the territory and feeds the nestlings and female when she is incubating eggs. Both the male and the female feed the nestlings high-protein live insects and occasionally berries.
Nestlings	The eggs hatch synchronously, generally within one 24-hour period. Both adults enter the nest box and feed live insects to the brood, but only the female sits on the nest and maintains a constant body temperature for the nestlings (thermoregulation).
Banding nestlings and adults	The nestlings are banded between seven to thirteen days after hatching and remain in the nest for 19 to 22 days, growing, developing feathers, and preparing to fledge. When the nestlings are banded, the adults are also trapped and banded using a cage-like trap baited with live mealworms.
Fledging	Nestlings fledge at about 21 days and do not return to the nest box. The parents continue to feed them for several weeks after they fledge.
Multiple clutches	A second clutch may be started a week to ten days after the first brood fledges. On rare occasions, a third clutch may be attempted as late as mid-July or early August.
Birdbaths	Bluebirds love birdbaths and use them each day in the summer. Encourage homeowners to place a simple birdbath in the vicinity of the nest box. One that can be emptied and refilled with fresh water weekly and located near a tree for perching is the best. Homeowners enjoy watching whole bluebird families use the bath.

Birds Using Prescott Nest Boxes

Species	Field Marks	Nest	Eggs
Western Bluebird	6 inches long; male has bright blue head, wings, tail, red breast; female has gray head, back; blue wings, tail; white eye ring	3-5 inches deep; fine grasses only	4-7 usually pale blue 13-14 days to hatch one egg laid per day
Tree Swallow	5½ inches long; blue-black head, back, rump; white below extending to eye; first year brown above	3-4 inches deep; grasses lined with feathers	3-6 white eggs smaller than bluebird; 14-16 days to hatch
Violet-Green Swallow	5½ inches long; violet-green above; white below, on rump, and above eye	3-4 inches deep; grasses lined with feathers	same as tree swallow; 13-14 days to hatch
Black-Capped Chickadee	4½ inches long; black cap, throat, white cheeks, gray back, white below	3-4 inches deep; grass, moss, fur, hair	6-9 white w/reddish spots; 11-13 days to hatch
House Wren	4½ inches long; all brown; tail cocked; bill curved	twig-filled box; cup lined with grass	5-9 white w/brownish speckles; 13 days to hatch
House Sparrow	5½ inches long; male black throat, gray cap, brown nape, back, heavy black bill; female brown, buffy eye stripe	coarse grass-filled box; string, feathers plastic, etc.	3-7 white, gray, and brown speckles; 10-13 days to hatch

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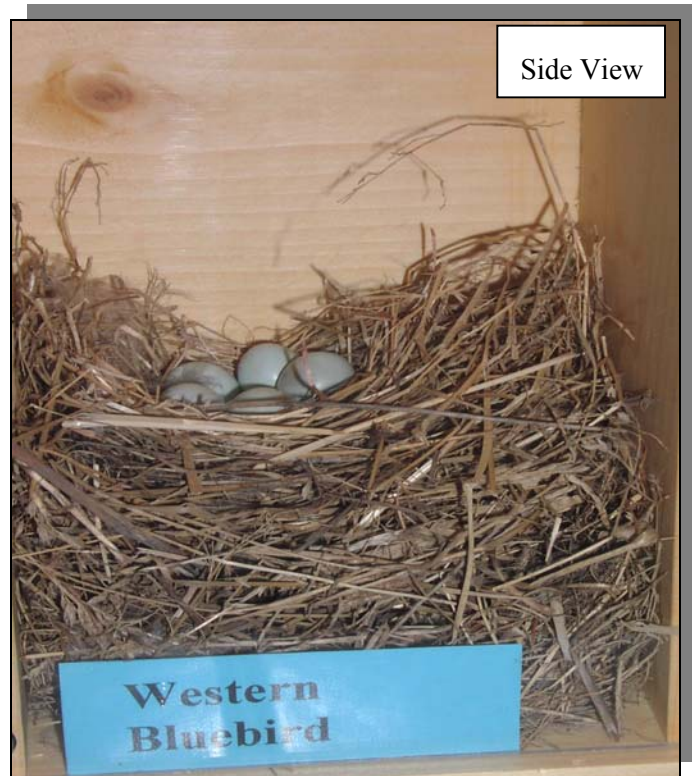
Pictures of Bluebird and Other Species' Nests

The following pictures show the interior of a typical nest box viewed from the top. For more information about nest construction, see Roger Tory Peterson's field guide, *Western Birds' Nests*.

Western Bluebird grass nest

Always a neatly constructed grass nest, it seldom contains any material but fine grass.

It is illegal to disturb or interfere with this native species.



Nesting Activity

Violet-Green Swallow grass and feather nest

Initially similar to the bluebird nest with a neat straw bowl, a swallow nest always contains feathers when the female starts laying eggs.

It is illegal to disturb or interfere with this native species.



Nesting Activity

House Wren twig and feather nest

Unlike the bluebird or swallow nest, a wren's nest is composed of twigs with some feathers and fills the box. Eggs are laid in the middle of the nesting material.

It is illegal to disturb or interfere with this native species.



Nesting Activity

Black-capped Chickadee moss and feather nest

Composed of a mat of moss, hair, grass, feathers, etc., a chickadee nest is relatively flat and distinctive.

It is illegal to disturb or interfere with this native species.



Nesting Activity

House Sparrow nest grass, straw, feathers, and other materials

Large and messy, sparrow nests often contain large pieces of straw, feathers, strips of paper, colored ribbon, string, and other found materials. You may remove and destroy house sparrow nests, eggs, young, and adults.



Nesting Activity

European Starling grass, straw, and other materials nest

Large and unorganized like sparrow nest, starling nests often contain twigs, large pieces of grass, and feathers. You may remove and destroy starling nests, eggs, young, and adults.

View from top



Nesting Activity

Pictures of Developing Bluebird Nestlings