

Supplemental Feeding

Introduction

Prescott provides mealworms at no charge to our volunteers for feeding adult bluebirds each week during regular nest box visits and to help feed nestlings when the rainy cold spring weather threatens survival. Banders order bulk supplies and distribute them to monitors.

If you wish to order your own worms, please first discuss it with your bander. Prescott banders receive a discount from our supplier and our policy is to place a large bulk order to save money.

Policies and Procedures

Feeding policy	Prescott policy is to distribute mealworms for a small fee to those homeowners who are willing to provide them as daily supplements to the first clutch only in the spring.
Frequent feeding	Some homeowners purchase their own supplies of mealworms to feed birds on their property all summer. We do not recommend frequent feeding throughout the breeding season , but we do not interfere with homeowners who wish to continue their own feeding practices. We prefer to limit daily feedings to the period when spring rains threaten survival.
Weekly snacks	When monitors provide ten to fifteen mealworms to nesting adults during weekly visits, the adult birds grow accustomed to the regular snacks. They often fly to the box when they see the monitor approaching. A small quantity of worms does not interfere with natural foraging and helps them acclimate to the human visits.
Helping the bander	When a pair of nesting adult birds successfully hatches a brood, the monitor schedules a banding date when the bander can place numbered bands on the nestlings' legs. The bander uses mealworms in a wire trap to capture the adults for banding. If the adult birds are accustomed to weekly snacks, they are more easily captured.
Adult capture importance	Banders attempt to capture adult birds during each nesting attempt and enter their band numbers and nest box numbers in our database. This is one of the most important aspects of our data-gathering project. The information helps us learn more about the population in general and reveals invaluable patterns of reproduction and pair bonding.
Feeding station	Feeding stations are available for mounting on the top of the nest boxes. Monitors also can nail a lid from a plastic food carton to the top of the box or to a nearby fence post to contain the worms and acquaint the birds with the feeding location. Before placing the lid, puncture it with a few drainage holes to allow water to escape.
Daily feeding records	Monitors are asked to keep track of nest boxes where frequent supplemental feeding occurs. The final nesting report contains a column for mealworms fed. At the end of the season, each monitor completes this report and notes "Yes" for only those clutches fed more than a weekly snack . This data helps us verify whether the homeowner's supplemental daily feedings are worthwhile or affect bluebirds.

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Mealworm Care Instructions

Banders order live mealworms in large quantities and parcel out portions to each monitor. Worms are kept in cartons with air holes and bran flakes, corn meal, or oatmeal for food.

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| Refrigerate worms | Refrigerate your mealworms in the container your bander supplied. They become dormant and survive for several months in the refrigerator. They must be dry and have access to air at all times to survive. If left at room temperature, they pupate and become beetles. |
| Keep worms alive | Bluebirds eat only live insects, so it is important that you feed live worms to them. Adults usually take live worms from the feeding station, fly down to the ground and smash the worms against the ground before feeding young birds. This softens and stuns the worms, making them easier to consume and digest. |
| Provide moisture | Place a small piece of moisture food such as raw potato, carrot, apple, or celery in the carton when you remove the worms from the refrigerator and they become active. Never leave these items in the container when you put it back in the refrigerator. |
| Replace grain | When the bran or other grain the worms are living in becomes sandy in appearance, add fresh grain. |
| Protect from heat | Never allow worms to stand in sun or extreme heat, such as in your car. We recommend carrying a small ice chest and ice when you are going to be in the field for more than a couple hours in hot weather. |

