



Updates from the Trail: May 2022

Species spotlight:

Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

If you've ever foraged for berries at the Quivett Marsh Vista trail, you've likely witnessed the spectacular display of the Eastern bluebird foraging for insects. Males are easily recognized by their dazzlingly bright blue back and reddish-brown breast (and a white side). Females have similar patterns but are much more muted. Both can be seen perched low atop shrubs or low hanging wires, scanning the ground for insects. When one is spotted, the bluebird darts down to the ground, hovers for a second, and darts back up to its perch. Bluebirds can have up to 3 broods of chicks throughout the season, and once that first brood hatches, the parents will forage non-stop. During the fall and winter, bluebirds turn to high fat berries from native plants such as Virginia creeper, staghorn sumac, and viburnums to fatten up for their migration South.

During the twentieth century, bluebird population plummeted by about 90 percent throughout New England. This was due several factors including habitat destruction, widespread pesticide use, and intense nest site competition with House Sparrows and European Starlings—both introduced bird species. Fortunately, however, these birds have been making a comeback due to conservation efforts including the construction and installation of bluebird specific nest boxes. BCT has 19 across 10 properties, maintained and monitored by dedicated volunteers.

The decline and subsequent rise of bluebird populations is a case study in the success that widespread conservation and collective efforts can have. Other more common bird species require the same amount of effort and cooperation to help save them from the brink of extinction. Two of the easiest things you can do is eliminate insecticide use in your home garden and shrink your lawn to plant more native plants. The “natural” and “organic” insecticides that your local mosquito company pumps into the air kills all insects—both pests, beneficials insects, and the insects that bluebirds rely on. You can read about more effective ways to control mosquitos, [like setting up larvae traps, here](#). Gardening for wildlife is one of the simplest and most rewarding actions we can take to help solve some of the challenges facing us today.



A male Eastern Bluebird perches atop one of the bird houses at the Eddy Sisters property (5/25/2022) Photo courtesy of Robert Debenham.



BCT Volunteer Steve Petruska points out a few recently hatched bluebird chicks to Vince and Jon. (4/26/2022)