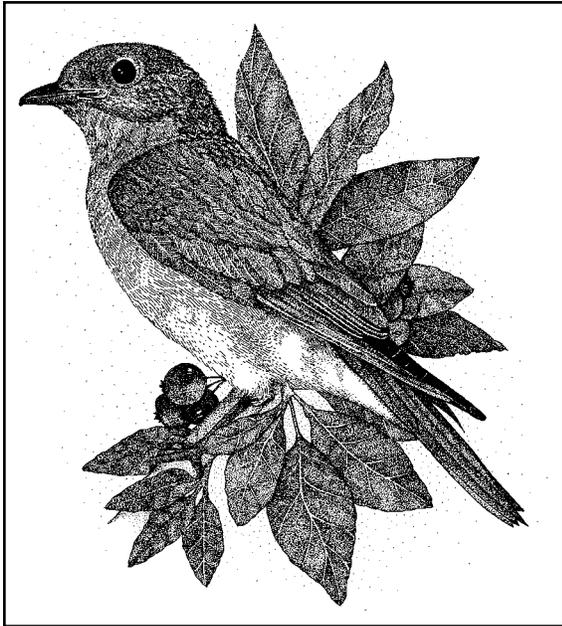
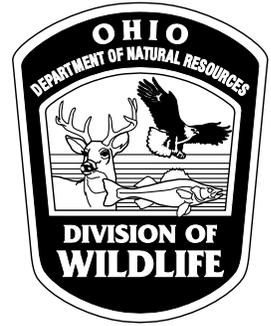


ODNR Division of Wildlife
Life History Notes
Eastern Bluebird

Scientific Name: *Sialia sialis*



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Introduction

Bluebirds were once common across Ohio when the countryside was composed of a mixture of small fields of hay, oats, corn, pastures, and orchards. As farming changed to a more monoculture approach—extensive fields of corn and soybeans—away from pastures and orchards, bluebird habitat declined in Ohio. Additionally, the introduction of the European starling and house sparrow created increased and stiff competition for the few nesting cavities available. Both factors have contributed to a decline in bluebird population numbers in the state.

Description

The Eastern bluebird is also known as the blue robin or the blue redbreast. These names can be attributed to the bird's appearance; the Eastern bluebird is the only bird with a bright royal blue back in combination with a rusty-colored breast. Females are a paler version of the males. Bluebirds are often recognized by their distinctive "chur-wi" call that is used to locate the singer—often perched on a fencepost or power line.

The Eastern bluebird is a member of the thrush family, related to the robin and the thrushes, including the gray-cheeked, wood, Swainson's, and hermit, and the veery.

Habitat and Habits

In the summer, bluebirds are insect eaters and will swoop down from a perch to take grasshoppers, beetles, and other insects including spiders, millipedes, and centipedes. All feeding is done during daylight hours.

Eastern bluebirds are often found near old field borders adjacent to short grasses. Highway rights-of-way, orchards, golf courses, and parks are frequently the home of a pair or more of this species. Those pairs often use man-made nest boxes that bluebird enthusiasts erect in suitable habitats. Nest boxes can attract these birds to fields where they have never been seen before.

Some bluebirds will overwinter in Ohio, especially in the southern part of the state. Traveling in flocks of 10 to 40 birds, they search out the fruits of multiflora rose and other shrubs and occasionally are attracted to feeders for mealworms or peanut butter. Often they roost together in the same holes they nested in earlier in the year, for extra body warmth during cold nights. Bluebirds in Ohio are vulnerable to late winter storms, which may eliminate an entire flock.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

Pairs of bluebirds begin their nesting season by choosing a natural cavity or an abandoned woodpecker hole in a post or tree, or perhaps a man-made nesting box. The bottom is lined with grass before the female begins laying her eggs. The female does most of the incubating while the male remains nearby. After the young hatch, both parents share in feeding them.

Young birds that have just left the nest are mostly gray, with just a touch of blue in their wings and tail. Their breasts are spotted much like those of baby robins. Males continue to feed the fledglings until the young become self-sufficient.

Management Plans

The Ohio Division of Wildlife has outlined goals and objectives for increasing the numbers of bluebirds in the state and for increasing opportunities for Ohioans to enjoy bluebirds in a variety of ways. The Division is promoting the use of nest boxes to attract bluebirds to suitable habitat. It is working cooperatively with bluebird organizations to educate the public about this species and is using the bluebird as a feature species in the schools to teach

principles of wildlife management and diversity. Although the Division does not manage its areas for a specific species, the management activities that do occur on the state's wildlife areas and elsewhere are designed to benefit bluebirds and a host of other wildlife species.

Viewing Opportunities

The best chance to see the Eastern bluebird is at an area where an old field comes together with an area of short grasses. As mentioned earlier, highway rights-of-way, orchards, golf courses, and parks are good locations. Abandoned railroad tracks that have been converted to bikeways should be added to this list.

If the area around you is suitable, your own property could become a "bluebird trail." A bluebird trail is five or more bluebird nesting boxes mounted on fence posts or pipes. The boxes are placed 100 to 200 yards apart on farms and other areas of low or sparse vegetation. The "manager" of the trail walks it every week or two to check the progress of the resident bluebirds. For more information on building bluebird boxes and establishing a bluebird trail call or write the Division of Wildlife and request Publication 339—*Hit the Trail for Bluebirds*.



Do Something Wild!

The Division of Wildlife manages for wildlife diversity in the state. We attempt to create and/or conserve the habitat that will support as wide a diversity of wildlife as possible. Many species of wildlife are hunted and trapped in the state, but many more, like the Eastern bluebird are not. The Division has a special program to manage and research nongame species that is supported by the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money either donated through the state income tax check-off, by the purchase of wildlife license plates, or direct contributions to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat that is essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement special efforts like the reintroduction of the osprey and the trumpeter swan to the state.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Special Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Building G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous; birds form a pair and work together to rear the young.

Peak Breeding Activity: April and July; bluebirds nest March through August

Incubation: 13-16 days

Young are Hatched: Most in April and July

Clutch Size: 3-7 eggs

Young Fledge: 15-20 days after hatching

Number of Broods per Year: 2

Adult Weight: 1-1.25 ounces

Adult Body Length: 6.5-7.5 inches including the tail

Adult Wingspread: 11.5-13.25 inches

Life Expectancy: 1 year or less

Migration Patterns: Some migrate south in the winter, others remain in the southern portions of the state.

Typical Foods: Insects in the summer, fruits and seeds in the winter

Native to Ohio: No, most likely migrated to the state as settlement cleared forests and farms were established.

For More Information

If you would like to know more about bluebirds in our state you may wish to contact:

The Ohio Bluebird Society
20680 Township Road 120
Senecaville, Ohio 43708

