

EASTERN BLUEBIRD



Richard Ground

SPECIES PROFILE

Scientific name: *Sialia sialis*

Other local name: Bluebird

Global status: Secure

Global distribution: Breeds east of the Rockies from southeastern Canada to Gulf of Mexico; also in mountains of southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and in Mexico. Winters in the southern part of breeding range. Bermuda has the only breeding population outside of North America.

Status in Bermuda: Native and vulnerable.

Distribution in Bermuda: Island wide, favouring less developed areas.

Conservation importance: Aesthetic importance. A biological control for pest garden insects.

Habitat: Open woodlands and extensive lawns (e.g. golf courses) with scattered trees. Only breeds in artificial nest boxes.

Threats: Loss of suitable nesting sites to development, competition from invasive birds (sparrows, starlings and kiskadees), predation on both adults and young by rats and cats, and the use of pesticides. There are recent reports of Warwick lizards entering nest boxes and eating bluebird eggs.

OVERALL TARGETS

Short term (5 years): To design and build a sparrow proof bluebird box and support conservation actions which sustain the current population level.

Long term (30 years): To restore the eastern bluebird population island-wide such that the species becomes common.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON SPECIES

The bluebird forms winter flocks which begin to break up in March when males and females form breeding pairs. Males have a vivid blue plumage, females are similar but duller in colour. Bluebirds are territorial, claiming approximately one hectare per pair. Historically, the hollows of cedar trees were used for nesting but more recently, bluebirds have become completely dependent on artificial bluebird nesting boxes.

Life History

The male chooses the nesting site and the female builds a neat nest using dry casuarina needles or grass. The female lays three to five pale blue eggs on consecutive days and incubates them for two weeks. After hatching, the young bluebirds typically fledge within three weeks. Bluebirds generally have two to three broods per season (March-August), but due to the aggressive house sparrow competing for nest boxes it is often reduced to one at the end of the season when the sparrow nesting season has ended. Bluebirds eat live insects and grubs. Sparrows are the biggest natural threat to bluebirds as they compete with them for nesting sites, driving away the adults and killing the young. They also expose young bluebirds to parasitic insects which can kill the hatchlings.

Existing measures for conservation

The establishment of bluebird trails, the monitoring of these trails and bluebird boxes, the box building programme and public awareness campaigns are ongoing. Bluebirds are protected by the Protection of Birds Act (1975). Some bluebird boxes are located in nature reserves and are therefore protected by Parks regulations, or are offered protection in National Trust and Audubon reserves.

Recommended Actions

Legislation and Policy: Already protected by the Protection of Birds Act (1975).

Habitat Protection: Promote the protection of key habitats.

Activity	Priority	Action Taken
Encourage the installation of bluebird boxes in appropriate locations.	A	✓

Direct Species Intervention: Implement plans to control the harmful effects of other species and implement additional ex-situ measures to aid in the conservation of bluebirds.

Implement a sparrow control programme.	A	
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Reduce the feral cat population island-wide.	A	
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Expand upon the current bluebird rehabilitation efforts by establishing a rehabilitation center.	B	
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Research and Monitoring: Promote research and monitoring programmes for eastern bluebirds over the next 2 years.

Continue experimentations with improved bluebird box designs.	A	✓
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Increase the monitoring of established public and private boxes.	A	
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Design, produce and distribute a bluebird questionnaire survey island wide.	A	
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Conduct an island-wide bluebird banding survey to determine current population.	B	
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Where information is thought to be lacking, conduct an in depth study into the ecology and behaviour of Bermuda's bluebirds and sparrows.	B	
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Communications and Publicity: Promote ongoing public awareness of the threats to, and conservation of, Bermuda's bluebirds

Develop a print campaign to explain threats to and responsible public behaviour towards bluebird conservation	A	
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Increase awareness levels of the importance of installing and monitoring bluebird boxes on private property	A	
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Plan Monitoring: Develop and implement a monitoring plan to assess the success of the species action plan

Provide an annual report to the Department of Conservation Services on the progress of the species action plan.	A	
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Principle contact: President of the Bermuda Audubon Society