



# Early Bird 2021

## ABOUT THE EASTERN BLUEBIRD

For many different cultures, the bluebird is a symbol of happiness. If you saw the eastern bluebird's beautiful (you guessed it) blue feathers, you might agree. These lucky birds get to migrate to Mexico or the southeastern parts of the United States for the winter and return to our area in February or March. Because of this, the bluebird is also considered a sign of wonderful things to come—for many of us in Minnesota and Wisconsin, that wonderful thing is the arrival of spring!

In the 1930s to 1960s, the eastern bluebird population in the Midwest declined greatly due to habitat loss, but thanks to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota, bluebirds are thriving once again. Now, Minnesota has one of the most successful bluebird recovery projects in the nation—here's to finding the root cause of a problem and taking action to solve it!

Eastern bluebirds love to sing, and often use songs to stay in touch with their other flock members. (They'd do well at Girl Scout camp—do you think they could chirp out "Make New Friends"?) Their songs and calls can have many meanings, from letting nestlings know that adults are returning with food to warning others that a predator is nearby. Some male birds will even sing softly while female birds lay eggs.

The bluebird is beloved by gardeners because they gobble up pests and insects that would otherwise destroy flowers and vegetables. In fact, before modern pesticides were invented, farmers would specifically build bluebird houses next to their crop fields to help control insects. Pretty cool, right?

**Read on for activities you can do to learn more about this special bird, and have a happy Early Bird season!**

### *Whose nest is this?*

Bluebirds are cavity nesters, which means that they build nests, lay eggs, and raise their young inside holes or cavities. One of the reasons that the bluebird population dwindled in the past decades is because there weren't enough of these potential homes, which caused birds to have to compete to nest in the holes and cavities. Invasive species like house sparrows and European starlings were more aggressive and took over the nesting spots. That's why people started putting up nest boxes to help bluebirds! It's important to monitor the nest boxes to keep out unwanted animal residents like mice, squirrels, and house sparrows or European starlings. Can you identify who's nesting in the nest box?

**MATERIALS:** Pencils; scrap paper

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Share copies of the "Whose Nest is This?" handout (page 4 only for girls).
2. Read the descriptions of the different types of nests made by cavity nesters. As you're reading, have girls look closely at the pictures of the nests on their "Whose Nest is This?" handout.
3. Girls should write down the name of the bird they think corresponds with each nest.
4. After girls have written down their answers, review the correct ones with the whole group.



*Photo by nestwatch.org*

## Origami Bluebird Mobile

Eastern bluebirds are very social creatures and like to do things together. During the winter, they'll huddle together with other family groups to stay warm and will often travel in large flocks. Did you know that sometimes offspring from a previous brood—that's what we call the group of baby birds that hatch at one time—will stay with their parents to help raise the next hatchlings?

Fold a little family of bluebirds, then turn it into a mobile to add cheer to any room.

**MATERIALS:** Blue paper (pre-cut origami paper, or paper cut into squares); wooden dowels (or sticks from the yard); yarn, embroidery floss, or string; sewing needles

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Follow instructions at [bit.ly/origami-bluebird](https://bit.ly/origami-bluebird) (PDF) or [bit.ly/flapping-bluebird](https://bit.ly/flapping-bluebird) (YouTube Video) to fold the origami bluebirds. Each girl should fold at least four or five birds for a robust-looking mobile. For more visual interest, you can use different-sized paper to make smaller and larger birds.
2. Give each girl a dowel or stick.
3. Create a handle for the dowel by tying a piece of yarn, floss, or string to each end.
4. Use a needle to thread a length of yarn (or floss or string) through the middle of each bird. Then tie a knot at the bottom of the piece of yarn so the bird doesn't fall through. Tie the yarn to the dowel. Repeat with the remainder of the birds.



Photo by happypuppytruffles  
via YouTube

## Build a Nest Box

If your troop is now passionate about protecting these beautiful birds, you're in luck! Most nest boxes can be built with just a few materials and some elbow grease. Take heed though—once you build and put up a nest box, you have a responsibility to monitor it. If you're willing and able to carry out these duties properly, use one of the many instructions available online to build one. Nest Watch ([bit.ly/nestwatch-bluebird](https://bit.ly/nestwatch-bluebird)) has pointers on where to put your nest box, how to troubleshoot if you don't see any bluebird occupants, and what to do if you discover eggs in your nest box. Find nest box design plans on Nest Watch ([bit.ly/nestwatch-bluebird](https://bit.ly/nestwatch-bluebird)) and Michigan Bluebird Society ([bit.ly/michiganbluebirds](https://bit.ly/michiganbluebirds)).



Photo by Fred Stille, Sr  
via michiganbluebirds.org

## More to Explore

- **Read a book:** There's so much to learn about bluebirds! A few titles that girls might enjoy are *My Happy Year by E. Bluebird* by Paul Meisel and *What Bluebirds Do* by Pamela Kirby.
- **Surf the web:** Listen to an assortment of the bluebird's beautiful melodies ([bit.ly/audubon-bluebird](https://bit.ly/audubon-bluebird)). During nesting season (which can range from March to July), check the bluebird nest cam ([bit.ly/bluebird-nestcam](https://bit.ly/bluebird-nestcam)) to see if any broods are present.

# Whose nest is this?

## DESCRIPTIONS OF NESTS MADE BY CAVITY NESTERS

### **EASTERN BLUEBIRD**

Made with fine or coarse grass, or pine needles. Sometimes you'll see bits of fur or some feathers in their nest. It's neat, cup-shaped, and fairly deep.

### **HOUSE WREN**

Made with sticks and twigs. It's a messy nest and may look like it's filled to the brim with sticks.

### **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE**

Made with moss, fur or animal hair, and soft plants.

### **HOUSE SPARROW**

Made with coarse grass, straw, feathers, and other odds and ends like paper, cloth, and even plastic. It's a tall nest with a tunnel-like entrance.

### **ANSWERS:**

- (A) Eastern bluebird
- (B) Black-capped chickadee
- (C) House sparrow
- (D) House wren

# Whose nest is this?



**A:** \_\_\_\_\_



**B:** \_\_\_\_\_



**C:** \_\_\_\_\_



**D:** \_\_\_\_\_