

When should bluebird boxes be available for prospective tenants?
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Bluebirds frequently nest in man-made boxes that are positioned in an appropriate habitat. I maintain boxes and habitat at both of my tree farms to encourage these beautiful birds to share space with me and in return I get some good photographic opportunities.

Generally, in the North, bluebirds start looking for potential nest sites in March. It is important to have last year's nesting material cleaned out of the boxes in a timely manner. This year I got some pretty good evidence of what constitutes a timely "clean by" date in my locations of Greene County, PA, and Monongalia County, WV. I removed last year's nesting material from boxes on April 27, 2022.



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On April 29, 2022, I observed a male/female Eastern Bluebird pair evaluating the potential spring nest locations shown in the above photo. While the calendar date may vary from year to year, I noted that it coincided with leaves emerging on most invasive plant species (multiflora rose, Asiatic honeysuckles, Japanese barberry, etc.). Black cherry was also in the early stage of leaf emergence (light green color). The male (foreground) seemed to prefer the closer box while the female wanted him to take another look at the box with a slightly different orientation, but would still make use of the same bugging area. When I left, no final decision had been reached.

Bluebirds do not tolerate another nesting couple this close to their nesting site. The recommended distance between bluebird-occupied boxes is 300 feet. In my pictured case, I have observed that often the rejected box is occupied by tree swallows or wrens.



Tree swallows also provide nice photographic opportunities.

English sparrows and starlings are invasive species that are serious competitors for nesting boxes. Openings like this one that are at least 1/4 mile away from human habitations (like active farmsteads) are especially valuable to Bluebirds. English sparrows and starlings are much less competitive when human provided food sources are not readily available.