

# Bluebirds have made a huge comeback!

I have over 50 Bluebird nest boxes along the back roads of the former Bruce Twp. and a half dozen on the Kincardine Golf Course. These are always in pairs because they are also used by Tree Swallows which start nesting before the Bluebirds each spring. The Tree Swallows will not let another swallow nest nearby but will allow Bluebirds.

Over the decades I have hosted a number of these beautiful birds, but last spring something special took place. Bluebirds decided to nest in a box on our lawn right outside our kitchen window. This allowed me to observe the complete life cycle at close range, an opportunity that doesn't come easily.

To start, even though Bluebirds have made a huge comeback, they are still rare enough that most people seldom see them. The whole breeding cycle happens very quickly in about five weeks.

The males show up first, stake out a territory and start singing to attract a mate. Once a female joins him, they go about picking a nestbox. If there are more than one, it's quite fascinating to watch this process. It appears to me that the female chooses, but that could be

BY  
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## Rooftops



anthropomorphism on my part. Within a couple of days, they will build a neat nest from grasses or pine needles, another few days to lay four or five blue eggs, two weeks to incubate, and then the young fledge in 16 days. Of course, the parents continue to feed them once they are out of the nest box, but it all happens pretty quickly.

Last spring we were witness to an interesting drama. A family of Cooper's Hawks took up residence in our pine forest only about 100 meters from the Bluebirds. Cooper's Hawks eat birds and while the Bluebirds were feeding their newly hatched young, the female was eaten. The male was frantic trying to feed the five babies and began singing again to attract a mate. Believe it or not, he did attract a new mate, so I'll call her the step-mom.

Each time the male went into the box to feed the young little bugs and various insects, he would come out carrying a fecal sac. These are little sacs of bird poop which helps keep the nest clean. However, the step-mom would come to the box and feed the young through the hole, but drew the line about fecal sac removal. Even more interesting is that for one afternoon, another male showed up and there were three adults feeding the young. The extra male left the next day, but the step-mom hung in there and was present when the young fledged, leaving the box on day 16. At that point they can fly, leaving the box to fly to the nearest tree.

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