

Go Figure! Calculating your bluebird's first egg date, hatch date and fledge date.

By Penny Brandau

Whether you have one bluebird box in your back yard or 100 bluebird boxes on trails it is VERY important to be able to calculate three important dates of each bluebird nesting attempt. It is recommended by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, North American Bluebird Society and many other bluebird conservation organizations that you check your bluebird boxes at least once each week but preferably twice a week during bluebird nesting season, from mid- March through August, and keep accurate notes of nest status, young and adult status each visit. This information will be critical in calculating your bluebird's first egg date, anticipated hatch date and also expected fledge dates. Here is a simple way to figure those important dates.

Most songbirds lay one egg per day. When they have laid the last (ultimate) or second to last (penultimate) egg of that clutch the female bluebird begins incubating them. Incubation develops the eggs into chicks and typically takes 14 days for bluebirds. Since they were all incubated for the same length of time all eggs will normally hatch within 24 hours of each other. It will then take 17-20 days for these newly hatched bluebird chicks to develop enough to fly (fledge) from their nestbox.

JUNE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

JULY

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Use the information about nesting and the sample calendar above to figure a first egg date, expected hatch date, and also fledge date. Imagine that you checked your nestbox on the 4th of June and found 2 eggs. You know that the female laid *her first egg one day earlier, on the 3rd. This is first egg date!* If you checked the nestbox again on the 8th and found 4 eggs you could figure that the mother must have laid

her last egg on the 6th. First egg- June 3, second egg- June 4th, third egg- June 5th, **fourth (Last) egg- June 6th**. You know that the female started to incubate all of her eggs on the last egg date (June 6th) and that she will incubate them around 14 days before they hatch.

Hatch date in this scenario could be calculated as 14 days from June 6th. Hatching could be expected therefore around June 20th! Got it?

Anticipated fledge date would be 17 to 20 days AFTER the eggs hatch for bluebirds. That can also be easily estimated by adding 17- 20 days to the hatch date of June 20th. In this scenario the fledge date should be around July 7-10.

First egg date- June 3rd. Hatch date- June 20th Fledge date- July 7-10 Easy!!

In our region Eastern Bluebirds will often nest twice each season, rarely three times. April is usually when first nesting attempts occur and the second nesting attempts often start in late May to late June. Knowing the date of the first egg and the size of the clutch allows us to figure the hatch date and the expected fledge date.

In order to avoid premature fledging, it is important to avoid opening the door of a nestbox when the bluebird chicks reach the age of 12-13 days old. Knowing your expected first egg, hatch and fledge dates can save the lives of your young bluebirds. Go figure! 😊

