

Fact Sheet to Accompany Bluebird Growing Up Game

B: Bluebirds build a neat nest out of grass or pine needles. The nest usually has a deep cup to help keep eggs and babies warm. Bluebirds lay one egg a day, usually in the morning.

U: Bluebirds lay 3-7 eggs in a nest. Once she is done laying eggs, the mother starts to incubate the eggs, so that all the eggs will hatch at about the same time, and the babies will fledge together.

I: The babies begin to hatch. It may take hours or a whole day for them to break free from the shell. Bluebird eggs are normally blue, but this picture shows unusual white eggs. Notice that the babies are still wet.

L: Newborn babies have bright pink skin and a few tufts of fuzzy down. Their eyes are closed.

D: Babies need a lot of food because they grow quickly. Both the mother and father bluebird help feed them, bringing insects (like spiders, caterpillars, grasshoppers, mealworms, and beetles) and sometimes berries about every 15-20 minutes. The parents remove the fecal sacs (poop) to keep the nest clean.

A: By Day 8-11, the first feathers start to grow. They look like quills. Eyes open up.

N: By now, the pink skin is covered with growing feathers.

E: Around Day 11-12, you can tell the boys from the girls. The boys have cobalt blue feathers on their wing and tail, while the girls have duller gray-blue feathers, with white edging on the outer tail feathers. Notice that the babies eyes are now fully open.

S: By Day 13, the babies have all their feathers. It's important not to open a nestbox after Day 13 because the babies may get scared and jump out of the nest while they are still too young. At this stage, the babies may pretend to be asleep or dead if the box is opened.

T: Bluebird babies "fledge" (fly away from the nest) about 17-18 days after hatching. Young bluebirds have a spotted breast and back, and a white ring around their eyes. They will often beg their parents to feed them for several weeks after leaving the nest. By about Day 30, they can hunt by themselves.

I: An adult male bluebird is smaller than a Robin. He has bright blue feathers on his head and back. His breast is rusty red, and his beak and feet are black. The female looks similar, except the feathers on her head and back are a duller grayish-blue.