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BY JEFF KOSLOFSKY — LOUDOUNEXTRA.COM

The Loudoun County Wildlife Conservancy held an orientation session Saturday at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in Leesburg for volunteers assigned to monitor bluebird nest boxes along county trails. The volunteers check the boxes once a week to note any activity inside.

## A Paradise for Bluebirds

### *Volunteers Monitor Hundreds of Nest Boxes Along 22 Loudoun Trails*

By JEFF KOSLOFSKY  
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Spring is around the corner, and that means bluebirds nesting in Loudoun County will be looking for new homes.

To help make Loudoun a homier place, Elizabeth Evans and Debra Gutenson of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy held an orientation session Saturday for the volunteers assigned to monitor nest boxes along trails throughout the county.

Each of 22 trails has 12 to 24 such boxes on poles, and the volunteers check them

once a week to note any activity inside. Their work helps the wildlife organization track trends for the species, which became nearly extinct in the 1980s, in an effort to understand what the birds need to stay alive.

During the session at the Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve in Leesburg, Evans and Gutenson discussed how to clean the boxes, build a safe box and, above all, how to watch out for predators such as the house sparrow.

"The most important thing is, if you're going to put up a bluebird box, make sure that it's got predator guards on it, and make sure

you monitor it," Gutenson said. "If not, you're just creating a lunch box."

Evans said that bluebirds continue to lose their habitats because of so much human activity. And more aggressive birds compete with the bluebirds for their nest boxes.

"They kick the bluebirds out," she said. "They sometimes even kill the bluebirds, so these birds need a little extra help."

To help educate the new volunteers, Cathy Darby of Purcellville, a monitor for boxes along the trail near Mountain View El-

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## A Warm Welcome for Bluebirds

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elementary School, created a game in which players had to match pictures of birds with photos of their nests.

Darby said people in Loudoun expect to see wildlife, and that is why events such as the one held Saturday are so important.

"Loudoun County is very in tune with wildlife," she said. "People move out here because they want to see more wildlife; they want to see the bluebirds."

The room was full, and Darby said attendance was twice as large as at least year's orientation session.

The conservancy also sponsors at least two bird walks a month at Banshee Reeks and the Blue Ridge Environmental Center for Environmental Stewardship in northwest Loudoun. Gutenson said those walks are a great way for people interested in preserving wildlife to get involved.

"You go out with a group, and there's always a handful of really expert birders," Gutenson said. "That's how you learn; you go out with those guys."

Conservancy officials said they are always looking for volunteers. One of the slides in Saturday's presentation put it this way: "Nestboxes + Volunteers = Bluebirds."