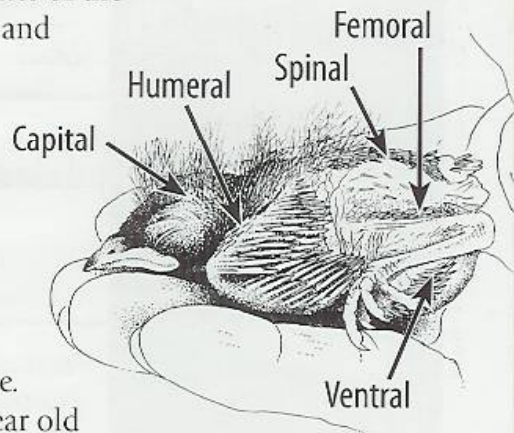















The following chart and photographs should help you hone your skill at aging Mountain Bluebird nestlings. Some leeway must be allowed, however, because a clutch of bluebirds generally takes 24 hours to hatch, with the first nestlings usually hatching in the early morning. Given the nestlings' rapid growth rate, this delay in hatching can result in a noticeable difference in age between the first and last young hatched. There will also be a significant change during each 24-hour period. It is recommended that you assign a hatching date according to the oldest nestling. Note also that growth and development rates of the young may be influenced by conditions of weather and food availability; a well-fed single nestling, for example, may be significantly more advanced at the same age than those nestlings of a brood of six who are poorly fed because they are being raised by a single parent during inclement weather.

















The descriptions accompanying the photos outline some general characteristics of the young as they age. Note: Just as humans aren't considered to be one year old until they reach their first birthday, so bluebirds aren't one day old until one 24-hour period has passed. For this reason, hatching day is considered to be Day 0.



Mountain Bluebird
nestling feather tracts

Day 0		Hatching day; pink in colour; eyes sealed; sparse tufts of down; moist at hatching; very tiny.	
Day 1		Similar to hatching date but with longer down tufts ('bad hair day'). Note that down is only on capital, humeral and spinal tracts.	
Day 2		Larger; down tufts still very long ('very bad hair day').	
Day 3		Ear openings evident for the first time; dark pin feather development under skin noticeable.	
Day 4		Body weight starts to increase rapidly; rapid growth of feet allows young bird to begin balancing itself.	
Day 5		DAY 5 TO 8: Eyes open for the first time. Feather tracts all dark.	
Day 6		Feathers start to break through femoral, humeral and spinal tracts.	
Day 7		Feathers fully broken through all tracts except wings.	

Courtesy of Myrna Pearman, Red Deer River Naturalists, Canada

Day 8		Still a little groggy; eyes focus; primary and secondary wing feathers still enclosed in the sheath.	
Day 9		Becoming more alert; primaries not yet exposed, but other feather growth evident; bare patches of skin still visible.	
Day 10		Primary wing feathers exposed just slightly; ventral and femoral tracts 'fluffy.'	
Day 11		Primary wing feathers exposed a bit more; becoming quite active; spots on breast evident.	
Day 12		Wing feather colour usually pronounced enough to sex them (males are intense blue; females are a more muted blue-gray).	
Day 13		Bright, alert and active; down feathers on crown stick out; no exposed skin except on lower abdomen; primary wing feathers more exposed; wing feather colour can definitely be used to sex; some individuals start to clack their beaks.	
Day 14		Sleeker; coordination increases. Avoid opening front- and side-opening boxes after this date.	
Day 15		Smooth in appearance; a few down feathers poke up here and there.	

Courtesy of Myrna Pearman, Red Deer River Naturalists, Canada