

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter July 2018

Spring is just a memory and Summer is more than halfway over. Bluebird trails are becoming less busy than they were in May and June. July trail checks are quicker to complete now that most of the tree swallows have fledged, but the 2018 nesting season is not finished yet! Nestbox checks should still be done at least every 7-10 days through July and then at least every two weeks in August. Any active nests with eggs or young should be still checked at least weekly of course. All nestbox fledging will be done by mid to late August, sometimes sooner. However, never assume that a nestbox which is empty in early to mid -July doesn't need to be checked anymore. More than one monitor has been surprised by late nestings of bluebirds and/or house wrens! Don't put away those hiking boots, screwdrivers, backpacks and trail notebooks yet! There might still be activity and surprises waiting for you to discover!

Bluebirds have completed their first nestings and in many cases have also fledged their second clutch of young. In a few instances they will successfully have three clutches of young, especially if their first clutches were started in early to mid- April. Busy, busy!

Tree swallows normally have only one clutch of young each year. When I see tree swallows aggressively defending their nests by swooping close to my head during nestbox checks I secretly applaud them. Their whole nesting season hinges on that ONE clutch so I understand their tenacity and determination to make it successful! Trying to drive away all possible predators (including us) makes perfect sense!

House wrens didn't arrive in our area until late April or early May but they are energetic nesters and will have two or three nesting attempts each summer, often lasting through mid to late August. Don't be astonished to find formerly empty boxes suddenly full of twigs and "almost hidden" wren eggs in July and August.



Pictured above: Tree swallow young getting ready to fledge soon (streamers of a sparrow spooker can be seen fluttering above the box roof).

In the second photo a female bluebird and one of her young fledglings is seen on the fitness trail at Royal Oaks Metro Park in Grafton. Getting in shape for the upcoming winter? 😊

Another interesting photo which was taken at Royal Oaks Metro Park shows an Eastern Meadowlark and Eastern Bluebird perched on posts at the fitness trail. It is so wonderful to see these beautiful native birds sharing the habitat there. According to the resource [All About Birds](#), “the male meadowlark sings beautiful flutelike songs from exposed perches, particularly fenceposts.” They are listed as “a common bird in steep decline”, are ground nesters and ground foragers. We appreciate Lorain County Metro Parks providing grassland habitat which is so critical for this bird species as well as habitat for our increasingly successful bluebird trails. And a big “Thank You” to the Park employees who have helped reduce tick problems on our trail monitors this year by judicious mowing of many bluebird trail areas adjacent to nestboxes. Thank you! Trail monitors really appreciate it!!



And now for the Drumroll... The June 1st, 2018 nestbox counts are tabulated and accompany this emailed newsletter as a separate attachment. Please take the time to check the information on the spreadsheet and if any inaccuracies are found please notify me so it can be updated. The first page of the report lists the number of tree swallow, bluebird, black capped chickadee and house wren eggs, chicks and fledglings on each of our Black River Audubon Society bluebird trails as of June 1st, 2018. On the second page there is information from the Pioneer Ridge Bluebird Landlords’ reports and pages 3 and 4 contain the reports from many, many private bluebird landlords in our area. The final spreadsheet page gives the total count from each of these categories.

I appreciate the invaluable help from Stephanie Bevan who created this visually attractive and concise document! Thank you, Stephanie! I also want to thank everyone who contributed data from their careful nestbox records! Thank you so very much!! Comparison of the 2017 June 1st counts to the 2018 June 1st counts in our area shows the following:

2017- Tree swallows, 886 eggs, 495 chicks, no fledglings as of June 1st. Total TRES= 1381

2018- Tree swallows, 683 eggs, 736 chicks, no fledglings as of June 1st Total TRES =1419

2017 Bluebirds, 134 eggs, 41 chicks, 213 fledglings as of June 1st. Total = 388

2018 Bluebirds, 120 eggs, 221 chicks, 148 fledglings as of June 1st Total=489 Wow!!

There were no reported Black capped chickadee eggs, chicks or fledglings in 2017 nor 2018.

2017 House wrens, 53 eggs, 0 chicks, 0 fledglings as of June 1st.

2018 House wrens, 23 eggs, 3 chicks, no fledglings as of June 1st.

Overall, we can see a definite increase in the combined totals on June 1st of tree swallow and bluebirds in 2018 when compared to 2017. There were a total of 1934 viable eggs, chicks or fledglings on that date in 2018 versus 1822 in 2017! This is exciting and encouraging! Lots of hard work, careful monitoring and improved nestbox management by many of you have made this possible! I can't wait to see what the results will be for the final end of season counts which are done in late August. Lots of nesting activity is occurring from June 1st to the end of August so these numbers will hopefully be much higher! I look forward to receiving final numbers from each of you by September 1st. Thank you!! 😊

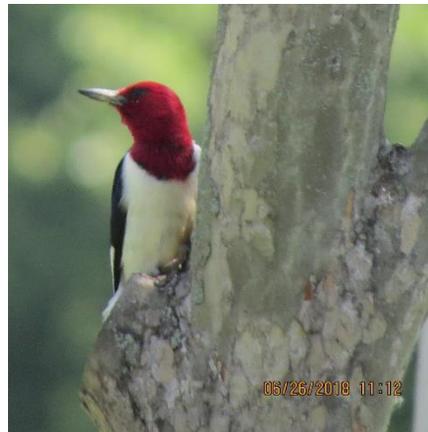
Keeping accurate trail and nestbox notes includes the (at least) weekly checks of the status of any nesting activity occurring in each box being monitored. This includes the bird species, the number of eggs or young and the final nesting outcome. First egg date, hatch date and anticipated fledge dates can be mathematically calculated when boxes are monitored regularly. In two cases this year our BRAS bluebird program has been asked by Tim Jasinski, a well-known bird rehabber from Lake Erie Nature and Science Center, if we could accept orphaned baby tree swallows and bluebirds. Accurate notes and aging calculations are vital when accepting foster chicks into a nest because it is critical to place these orphaned chicks into nests which have chicks within 1-2 days of the same age.



Pictured above is one of the two foster tree swallow chicks which were successfully placed into foster nests at High Meadows Park in Elyria. The second photo shows trail monitor Jim Jablonski

who reported the successful fledging of both of these chicks along with their new nestmates. The orphaned chicks were banded by Gary Fowler prior to being fostered into our nests. One other fostering attempt was made of a newly hatched bluebird chick who was the lone survivor of a House Sparrow attack which killed the bluebird mother. We know that bluebird hatchlings cannot survive long without the mother's presence in the first 4-5 days of their lives since she alone keeps them warm them with her body. The homeowner who discovered the orphaned bluebird clutch in her back yard nestbox knew that it had been several hours or more since the death of the mother bluebird and time was critical to locate another nest to place the lone surviving bluebird chick into. When trail monitors Marty Ackermann and Diana Steele learned of the urgent need for an active bluebird nest with newly hatched chicks they were able to find a perfect match in one of their nestboxes at Westwood Cemetery in Oberlin. (Their trail notes were so accurate that they knew the exact anticipated hatch dates of each of their nestboxes and knew one was due to hatch that day). Phone calls back and forth, transporting of the lone surviving hatchling from Cuyahoga County to its new home in Oberlin, and then follow up visits after placing the chick were just part of the process of attempting to save this little bluebird. Unfortunately, it had been too long from the death of it's mother to it's placement into our new foster nest. We were sad to hear from monitor Marty Ackermann that it had not survived when he checked it later in the day. 😞 Having a process in place to attempt to save orphaned chicks whenever possible takes time, dedication, detailed and accurate nestbox notes and good communication between rehabbers and nestbox managers. We are glad to be part of a group of conservationists who work together for the benefit of our native birds! Last year we were a part of helping to save both kestrel and tree swallow chick orphans!

I thought it might be interesting to show a few photos of some other native cavity nesting birds seen this summer. Pictured below are two primary cavity nesters (they create their own cavity).



Northern Flicker nesting in a maple tree in North Ridgeville. Her 6 white eggs hatched but were predated by a chipmunk. The red-headed woodpecker was seen in Grafton.



Secondary cavity nesters use either abandoned or natural cavities or man-made nestboxes. The American Kestrel is a secondary cavity nester. Pictured above is 11-year-old Sarah Oliver holding a baby kestrel before it was banded. Next photo shows Kestrel program coordinator Larry Wilson and kestrel nestbox monitor Diana Steele with Jill Fowler holding another banded kestrel chick. Below is a prothonotary warbler and wood duck- both secondary cavity nesters.



And our favorite secondary cavity nester is of course the Eastern Bluebird. May their numbers continue to increase! Wishing you the joy of bluebirds in your life!

