

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter August 2021

August already!! Most Bluebird boxes are empty at this time of the year. Trail checks can be done in record time since the large number of tree swallows which nested in many of the boxes in May and June already fledged in June and July. There might still be bluebird or house wren nestings however in late July/early August though, so please make sure you continue to check nest boxes through early August. Every spring as boxes are being checked and cleaned I hear of at least one or two bluebird landlords or monitors who find empty but used bluebird or wren nests from one of those late summer nestings which were missed. Keep checking at least every couple of weeks through July. You might find surprises!



Anni Pilisy and Deb Ackerman check their trail at the South Equestrian Center in late July. These two monitors have braved floods more than once this season to check their boxes. They

might be new monitors this year but they have certainly been as dedicated as most of our long-term monitors! You can see where the water level was in the first photo below in late July. The second photo shows dried mud on the floor of one box due to the flood waters! Thankfully that box was not occupied at the time of the flooding.



I would like to thank all of you who sent me your nestbox reports for June 1st this year. The spreadsheet with the results of your information accompanies this newsletter email as an attachment. Please let me know if I have entered any data incorrectly so it can be corrected. The spreadsheet has a section for the information about our Black River Audubon Society Bluebird trails, another section for reports from the Pioneer Ridge bluebird landlords and a third section for other private bluebird landlords. The last page is a summary with total numbers listed from each previous section. It is always interesting to compare the reported eggs/ chicks/ or fledgling numbers of this year to prior years.

Last year (2020) we had 1291 Tree swallow eggs reported on June 1st, 107 TRES chicks and no fledglings yet on that date. This year we had 1312 Tree swallow eggs on June 1st, 270 chicks and again, no fledglings yet on June 1st. Definitely a strong year for tree swallows in our area and earlier hatchings!

Bluebird numbers were slightly less than last year but a number of losses not included in the overall count were of bluebird eggs and chicks lost this year due to the cold wet weather in late April and early May.

On June 1, 2020 there were reports of 262 bluebird eggs, 136 bluebird chicks and 91 fledglings. In 2021 we had only 205 bluebird eggs, 96 chicks and 156 fledglings. Total bluebird young in 2020 on June 1st was 489 compared to 457 this year. Interesting that again there were more fledglings by June 1st in 2021 than in 2020.

It was very exciting to see reports of black capped chickadee nestings this year especially since we had none last year! There were 5 chicks and 16 which had fledged by June 1st this year. Adorable little birds! Can't wait to see what our final end of year count will be for these cuties!

Lastly, we collect data about house wren nestings and in 2020 there were 76 house wren eggs- this year we had only 43 wren eggs. I hope the reduced numbers are in part due to the strategic relocation of nextboxes which were favored by wrens. High house wren numbers call for a

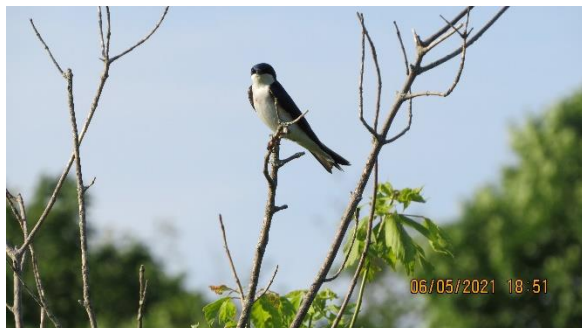
reevaluation of the location of the box. Possibly boxes should be relocated to a more open area away from bushes or tree lines? That usually helps reduce wren takeover of nestboxes.



Both of the above photos were late nestings on the South Equestrian trail on 8/7/21. The photo on the left shows a clutch of young wrens and the one on the right are young bluebird chicks.

Wrens like brushy, slightly overgrown areas whereas bluebirds prefer a more open habitat with scattered deciduous trees. Although house wrens are native and protected birds we try to avoid habitat locations that are attractive to them when we place nestboxes, primarily because they are NOT good neighbors to bluebirds or tree swallows and will aggressively take over nesting sites from those other species (even killing young bluebird or tree swallow eggs and chicks by pitching them out of the nest onto the ground near the base of the pole). By late season however wrens are known to move into more open areas to nest like those pictured in the above photo and it becomes harder to keep them out of prime areas.

Where do the birds that nest in our boxes spend the winter? According to the *All About Birds* Cornell website “Tree Swallows begin migrating south in July and August, flying during the day and roosting in large flocks at night. Eastern populations probably migrate along the Atlantic coast to winter in Florida and Central America. Except for the individuals that winter in Cuba, most Tree Swallows probably migrate along the coast to their wintering grounds rather than going over the Gulf.”



Eastern Bluebirds are resident year-round in our area of northern Ohio and are beautiful sights at heated birdbaths or dried mealworm feeders during the winter. They are considered resident or short distance migratory however in other areas. *All About Birds* says “Bluebirds leave breeding grounds in the north of their range to winter in the southeastern U.S. or Mexico. Populations in the northern part of their range are entirely migratory, spending winters in the southeastern United States or Mexico. Some fly as far as 2,000 miles between western Manitoba and Texas. Eastern Bluebirds from the southeastern U.S. may move short distances south or simply remain on their breeding territories all year.”

House wrens are another bird we commonly see in bluebird nestboxes during the summer but they are considered to be “Short to medium-distance migrant. Most House Wrens in North America migrate to the southern U.S. and Mexico for winter.”

Black Capped chickadees are favorites at winter bird feeders in our area. It is no surprise then to see that Cornell says this about their migration habits. “Adult chickadees don’t migrate. In years when chickadee reproduction is high, young birds sometimes move large distances, but these movements are irregular and are more accurately called “irruptions.”



I hope that wherever YOU spend the winter you will have the joy of beloved birds nearby!

Thanks to each of you who sent me your June 1st nestbox report. I hope you will also send me your end of season report this month. There is a form attached to this email which you can use or you can simply email me the number of eggs/chicks and fledglings which were in your boxes in 2021. Thank you! Stay safe and be healthy!

May all of your “blues” be bluebirds!!