

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter July 2023

July! The weeks of summer are literally flying by like the young birds that are flying out of our bluebird nest boxes! Bluebirds are in the process of having their second nesting's (or rarely a third nesting attempt). Most of the tree swallows have only one nesting per year and those young typically fledge by mid-July. Of course the black capped chickadees finished their single nesting by early June. House wrens and the unwelcome nonnative house sparrow are like Energizer bunnies though- they keep working at nesting through August.

Although the trails are markedly quieter this month since most of the tree swallows have fledged by now it is still very important to continue to check your nest boxes at least once a week through the end of July and then do at least one more check around the 7th of August. If all nest boxes are empty on that August 7th check then your trail can be considered finished for this year. Bluebirds and house wrens' nest into August but their nest will be at least started by August 7th. Every year I hear of surprised monitors who did a check on a trail they thought was empty and done, only to find another bluebird or house wren nest! Don't give up checking too early! You will be missing valuable nesting information and the joy of watching one more clutch grow and fledge! 😊



The photo above is one of my favorite patriotic bluebird photos. It shows our favorite red, white and blue bird on the wing of a statue of our national bird- an eagle. I hope your fourth of July was a time of family, friends, and gratitude for the many blessings we still enjoy.

The June 1st early season count has been compiled for 2023 and is attached to this newsletter. Please check your own personally reported information and contact me if I have made an error in the spreadsheet. Many thanks to Stephanie Bevan for her invaluable help with the technical work of creating the attractive document again this year! Thanks so much Stephanie!! 😊

It is always interesting to compare the June 1st reports to prior reports. I wonder if the week of cold rainy weather we experienced the first week of May could have been the reason that we had a higher percentage of TRES eggs compared to chicks on June 1st than we had in former

years? Could they have delayed nesting a few extra days due to the weather and so weren't as far along in the nesting cycle as they were in 2022? On June 1st, 2023 we had 1080 TRES egg and 512 TRES chicks compared to the June 1st, 2022 count of 992 TRES eggs and 645 TRES chicks. More TRES eggs had already hatched last year on June 1st. Interestingly, many monitors reported observing that the tree swallows seemed more desperate/aggressive in early May this year in their attempts to claim a nest box. The total count for tree swallow eggs and chicks combined was a little lower than last year on June 1st- 44 LESS.

The total June 1st count for Bluebirds however was strong this year with a total of 538 (144 eggs, 85 chicks and 309 that had already fledged before June 1, 2023). The total count for June 1st, 2022 was 475 (128 eggs, 103 chicks and 244 fledglings). So far, we are hopeful, because 2023 has potentially at least 63 more bluebirds that could fledge than 2022 had at the same time. The final end of year count will be higher also due to bluebirds second nestings in June and July.

House wren numbers were very similar on the June 1st count. There were 62 HOWR eggs on this date in 2022 and 58 eggs in 2023.

I was happy to see that Black capped chickadee numbers were up a little this year- they are such cute little native songbirds but unless they are provided with a 1 1/8 inch hole reducer on their chosen nest box they often are usurped by larger birds- bluebirds, tree swallows and house sparrows. The 16 black capped chickadees young and 7 fledglings for 2023 ALL had modified nest boxes to make the hole smaller. On June 1st 2022 all 13 of the black capped chickadees had already fledged from modified entrance holes. Once a monitor or bluebird landlord recognizes that their box has a chickadee nesting attempt (nest is made with soft moss and a top layer of fur) it is very important to change the hole size to the smaller 1 1/8 inch size. We are happy to provide these adaptations if you notify us of a black capped chickadee nesting in progress!



Another maintenance tip to increase successful fledging of our native bluebirds and tree swallows is to make sure that any sparrow spookers which have been placed on the box have all six mylar streamers intact. Many times, we see spookers missing one or two or more streamers which have torn off in the wind or were picked off by the birds. These spookers are NOT as effective as a passive house sparrow deterrent! Please make sure your sparrow spookers are in good shape during the time they are mounted on the nest box. The streamers should be long enough to lightly brush the roof of the nest box but should not hang down in front of the

entrance hole. Of course, spookers are not placed on a nest box until at least one bluebird or tree swallow egg has been laid and they should be removed as soon as the young fledge. 😊



Black River Audubon Society's Bluebird Program was able to help foster several orphan bluebird chicks in June and July this year. Tim Jasinski, the rehabber extraordinaire at Lake Erie Nature and Science Center in Bay Village, does an incredible job of accepting, nursing back to health and releasing many, many birds each week. In June he contacted our bluebird program for possible help in placing a five day old bluebird chick orphan he had received into one of our bluebird nests so that it could be raised by bluebird foster parents. These foster situations are always done under his supervision and approval and the orphan chicks must be placed into a nest with foster siblings who are within approximately one day of the same age as the orphan.

An email was sent out to all bluebird trail monitors in our BRAS program and several responded with information about their possible nest matches. The best match however was found in the backyard nest of monitor Charlie Weil. His five chicks hatched within 1 day of the orphan's hatch date, both parents were present and caring for their clutch, and after placing the foster chick into its new home at Charlie's house he was able to supplement the bluebird parents with live mealworms to help them feed the additional mouth in their nest. Happily, all six of these chicks successfully fledged by July 4th!

In late June we had another call regarding needed homes for four more orphan bluebird chicks that had been taken to Lake Erie Nature and Science Center. Both parents of these chicks had been killed and the bluebird landlord recognized the urgency of getting help right away and took them to Lake Erie Nature and Science Center. Getting a request to help find homes for 4

more chicks was challenging for our Bluebird Program but thankfully we have some very dedicated and compassionate trail monitors who also take incredibly accurate notes of each of their nest boxes and know exact hatch dates and anticipated fledge dates of each of their many nest boxes!! Placing orphaned chicks into new homes would be impossible without the help from these monitors who quickly responded again to my email plea for help.

Within 24 hours of being orphaned three of the ten- day old bluebird chicks found new homes and the last one was placed in an appropriate nest box a few days later. One of these four bluebirds went to New Russia Township trail (Thank you to monitor Sandy Kantelas), another went to Mike Smith's home nestbox in Wellington, a third joined new foster siblings at Mike Smith's private trail (Thanks so much Mike!) and the last one fledged from a nestbox at Kendal of Oberlin while monitor Kathleen Cerveny and I watched! Pictured below are the five bluebirds we fostered this year for Tim Jasinski at LENS in Bay Village. Four of these five chicks successfully fledged from their foster homes. A happy ending for most of them following the tragedy they faced earlier!



A couple of interesting photos were received from monitor Mike Smith also this month. Normally bluebird nests are relatively clean even after the clutch has fledged but Mike had a home nest box that was wet, had lots of bird feces and was the messiest bluebird nest he ever saw. He changed the nesting material once because the original material was so darkly stained and wet. One chick was found dead in the nest prior to the nest change. We believe that the female bluebird who was trying to feed her 5 chicks alone after the disappearance of her mate possibly resorted to feeding some of the plentiful purplish berries like elderberries or mulberries to her chicks but it caused such loose stools that the nesting material became wet and dark. Other possible scenarios for this strange looking nest? Photos below were taken after the remaining four chicks fledged.



I received the photo below from Olsen trail monitor Sharon Substanley. The photo was taken on her back porch and the chicken figurine looks shocked to see a male bluebird on its head. There are probably many hilarious captions that could be put on this photo- How would you caption it? Please send me your ideas and I will make sure to include it in the next newsletter!



Enjoy the last few weeks of summer! Best wishes for more successful fledgings!

Newsletter by Penny Brandau

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"An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day" - Henry David Thoreau