



# Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

## 2015 Spring Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

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The AGM is set for Saturday, March 14, 2015 at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.

Welcome to the 2015 OEBS spring newsletter. We are experiencing a very cold winter much like last year. February is on track to be one of the coldest February's ever. The month of December 2014 had above average temperature but November 2014, January and February 2015 were well below normal. What will this March bring, last spring 2014 it was the second coldest March since records have been kept in the area from 1915 at 5.6 degrees Celsius colder than average. March 2012 was the warmest ever at 7.6 degrees Celsius above average (eclipsing 1945's 6.9 degrees Celsius above average). As a result of the warm weather in March 2012 many bluebirds had record early egg dates. According to environment Canada's forecast on February 16th, the next two and ½ months are expected to be colder than usual in Ontario.

Overall in Southern Ontario, 2014 (and most of North Eastern North America) was the coldest year since 1980. (University of Waterloo Weather Station). The overall world average temperature was the warmest year ever. Some have attributed these colder temperatures that have made the northern half of North America colder to global warming caused by melting polar ice that contributes to these polar vortex masses of cold air.

Fewer bluebirds have been reported over wintering in 2014-2015, this may be a result of wild berry crops that were not as abundant this year. Numbers of Eastern Bluebirds on the 115th Audubon Christmas bird Counts for Ontario (December 4, 2014- January 4th, 2015) are also lower than in previous years. The bluebird's cousin the American Robin has been very scarce this winter. After the bitterly cold winter we had last year I would have expected a lower number of returning adult bluebirds but looking at the nest box reports for 2014 this does not seem to be the case as most nest box trails equaled last years or did a little better. This may indicate that most bluebirds are still migrating to the southern U.S. and avoiding winter all together.

Some trails in Carolinian areas were not as productive and this may be a result of lower numbers of returning adults as a result of over wintering mortality. As I explain later I believe at least some of my bluebirds attempt to over winter.

### ONTARIO AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT NUMBERS FOR EASTERN BLUEBIRD 1998-2013

Year	Count	No. of EABL	No. of Count Circles	No. of Observers
2013-14	114	540	36	140
2012-13	113	506	31	119
2011-12	112	652	39	132
2010-11	111	591	28	115
2009-10	110	505	22	83
2008-09	109	703	31	118
2007-08	108	484	19	77
2006-07	107	511	30	86
2005-06	106	580	23	87
2004-05	105	223	14	85
2003-04	104	547	19	87
2002-03	103	779	26	94
2001-02	102	408	20	58
2000-01	101	495	23	56
1999-00	100	627	19	61
1998-99	99	470	21	64

DISCUSSION - For most of the above counts bluebird numbers have stayed around 500 with a couple of exceptions. Environment Canada weather man David Philips called the winter of 2001-2002 the year without winter, this allowed more adult bluebirds to over winter successfully and breed in 2002. Their success is reflected in that year's highest count number ever recorded in Ontario at 779. The equalizer came with the ice storm in April of 2003 that killed many adult bluebirds resulting in a count of 547. With poor breeding success in 2004 it dropped even further to its lowest number at 223. **Weather is the number one factor affecting both adult mortality and breeding success.**

EACH PAID UP MEMBER AS OF 2014 WILL  
RECEIVE A EMBROIDERED BLUEBIRD CREST  
ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWLETTER

## OEBS AGM AGENDA MARCH 14TH, 2015

8:30–9:00 am	Registration- Wayne and Linda Buck
9:00–9:30 am	Presidents Report and introductions Business Meeting
	Slate of Executives for 2015 - Tom Kott
	Treasurer's Report - Anne Davidson
	Announcement of Conservation Award - Bill Read
9:30–10:15 am	Member nest box reports
10:15–10:45 am	Coffee break and viewing of Bucket Raffle items
10:45–11:15 am	Prothonotary Warbler Video - Don Wills
11:15–11:35 am	CWS Orchard Video- Bill Read
11.35–11:50 am	NABS nest box Video - John Balga
12:00–1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30–2:25 pm	EasternWhip-poor-wills in Ontario - Audrey Heagy
2:25–3:00 pm	Coffee break and viewing of Bucket Raffle items
3:00–3:30 pm	Nest boxes show and tell open discussion
3:30–4:00 pm	Bucket Raffle – Tom Hunt

### BUCKET RAFFLE

If you have an item for the bucket raffle  
please bring it along to the meeting.

## OEBS Annual Eastern Bluebird Field Trip

This year's trip is **Sunday, May 24th, 2015**. We will meet at **9 am** at the **Orchard Home Apple Orchard**. The farm is located one concession north of St. George on Howell Road. See the home page of our website for more details. Please confirm by email - [billreadsbooks@gmail.com](mailto:billreadsbooks@gmail.com) or phone 519 572 3633.

**2014 BIRDATHON** Sylvia Van Walsum is unable to do Birdathon this year but will be back for 2016. We thank her for the many years she has raised money for the Baillee fund and OEBS. Anyone interested in doing birdathon for OEBS can contact Bill Read at the above address.

**NEST BOX REPORTS** from 2014 indicate good success on most trails for bluebirds and above average success for Tree Swallows on almost all trails. **One problem that has emerged from the reports is the predation caused by House Wrens, removing both Tree Swallow and bluebird eggs.** Since House Wrens are a fully protected native bird their nests can't legally be removed or altered. Other methods have to be used. If I have bluebirds fledge young and House Wrens are near that box and I know they will attempt to nest, I tape the hole before they attempt to nest so they have to move somewhere else. Placing boxes in more open

areas may help but wrens can also visit these boxes. If anyone has a successful method of excluding House Wrens please let me know and I will put it in the newsletter.

## Member Nest Box Reports for 2014

A total of 41 trails representing 257 nest boxes were reported by the **Essex County Field Naturalists Club** in 2014. These nest boxes fledged **115** bluebirds from 33 successful nests. Don Bissonnette coordinates this effort and in the process recorded his 26th year of bluebirding. White lithium grease is used to stop climbing predators on the free standing poles or T-bars. There were 10 successful House Wren nests and 190 Tree Swallow nests producing **847** fledged young. House Sparrows were recorded as the number 1 cause of nest failure.

**Kurt Frei** and **Peter Rea** had another very successful year with **98** bluebirds fledged from their trail of 134 nest boxes in the Hamilton Burlington area. All poles are greased. A total of **584** Tree Swallows and 22 House Wrens also fledged from these boxes. One possible nest failure was caused by a weasel.

**Robert Majkut** had 1 successful nesting fledging **4** bluebirds from 3 nest boxes in Ridgeway. A Black Capped Chickadee and House Wren nested in the other 2 boxes.

Your newsletter editor **Bill Read** had a less than stellar year with only **183** fledged bluebirds. This compares to **280** in 2013 and **377** in 2012. I did lose one large orchard in 2013 that fledged on average 60 bluebirds each year. Through banding I was able to count 40 pairs or  $183/40 = 4.575$  young fledged per pair in 2014. This is one of the lowest fledged young per pair totals that I have ever had. Tree Swallows had another successful year with **444** fledged from 94 pairs (4.72 fledged young per pair). All boxes are protected from predators by using grease on free standing metal poles and T-bars. There were 19 bluebird re-nests, but unexplained failures, infertile eggs and low egg totals brought the numbers down. There were some bright spots; one orchard north of Hamilton fledged 36 bluebird young from just 4 pairs or 9 young per pair. You always expect that your bluebird totals will go up from year to year but it doesn't happen that way. I have a couple of possible explanations as to why my numbers are down. Many of my failures came along roads where Soy beans and or corn were planted on both sides of the road. This past year there seemed to be a correlation with poor success and these crops. Corn reduces foraging access for bluebirds. I had only **46** re-traps of previously banded bluebirds (93 in 2013, 131 in 2012) but my highest total of newly banded adults at 56. The average age of the 46 re-traps was 1.93 years. This is slightly lower than in previous years and tells me that my population did not fare well over the winter with higher than usual adult mortality. These newly banded adults or recruits into the



(76) BLUEBIRD (MALE AND FEMALE).  
*Sialia sialis sialis*.  
A common summer resident, breeding throughout its range. Arrives about the middle of March. Departs toward the end of October.  
Made in 1872, 1875.

Painting by William Pope

population are replacing those that did not make it through the winter. This brings up another question- Where do my bluebirds go in the winter? I hope to solve this question by using radio transmitters or geo locaters at some future date. Many bluebirds now attempt to over winter in the Carolinian areas above Lakes Erie and Ontario. Most winters they seem to be successful but the winter of 2013-2014 was not a good one to stay here. It was one of the coldest winters on record. Don Wills found 9 dead adults in nest boxes and I found three following that winter. Even though some made it through the winter there was definitely higher than usual adult over wintering mortality. Reproductive success on bluebird trails further north of Carolinian areas was quite good indicating to me that populations in these areas still migrate to their former haunts in the Southern U.S. They were able to avoid our cold winter completely. I would postulate that many bluebirds fledging from boxes in the Carolinian areas of Ontario like mine attempt to over winter here or just on the other side of Lake Erie in the northern states like Ohio and Pennsylvania.

**Willie Moore** from Simcoe fledged **10** bluebirds from his trail of 8 nest boxes in Norfolk County.

**Gerard Powers** had another very successful year fledging **302** bluebirds from his trail of 200 nest boxes. This is Gerard's second best total only surpassed by 332 in 2012. A total of 50 bluebird pairs were represented or 6.04 fledged young per pair- an excellent result. Those guys up in Grey County seem to know what they are doing. A total of **517** Tree Swallows also fledged along with **23** BCC. Gerard reports that European Paper Wasps have been a major problem in other years but not this year, this is probably a result of the cold winter last year killing off the over wintering queens. The queens are

the only ones that survive over the winter to start a new colony.

**Henry Miller** had another very successful year fledging **175** bluebirds from a combined trail of 352 nest boxes in the Rainy River District. Henry monitors 255 boxes and a team of 7 volunteers monitor another 97 boxes which Henry checks on periodically. Last winter 2013-2014 was the coldest winter they have had and both bluebirds and Tree Swallows did not start laying eggs until June 5th. They were successful with many pairs able to have a successful second nesting which meant they stayed later into the summer. A total of 278 blue eggs and 10 white bluebird eggs were laid. There were **101** successful nests of Tree Swallow and 11 of House wren. The last bluebird was seen on October 9th. Overall a very successful year.

The **Halton Bluebird Club** fledged **32** bluebirds (from 71 eggs) on their 26 year old trail of 71 nest boxes. This is the lowest fledged total since 2008. A total of 18 nestlings were lost (either missing or found dead) and 16 eggs either did not hatch or went missing. All boxes are located in Bronte Provincial Park in Oakville. Despite the record cold winter of 2013-2014 bluebirds were seen in the park all winter. The following people were involved in this co-operative effort- Belinda Wagg, Don Morrison, Floyd Elder, Irmgard Richter and Trevor Stock, Tom Hunt, Bill and John Karner, Bobbi Greenleese, Joyce Lechasseur (coordinator), Kirsten Burling, Steve Garland. Birds were banded by Sylvia van Walsum.

**David Lamble** fledged **99** bluebirds from his trail of 409 nest boxes in Wellington county. The percentage of fledged young to eggs was 74%. Fledged young (99) per pair (25) was **3.96**. David had **141** successful nests of Tree Swallow, 3 of black Capped chickadees and 2 of house wren. There were 29 unsuccessful nests of Tree Swallows. A total of 107 bluebirds and 654 Tree Swallows were banded. House Sparrows and weather were recorded as the no 1 and 2 causes of presumed nest failure.

David also manages 112 nest boxes on a trail in Dufferin County that was formerly monitored by Dave Raynor and the late Shelly Anderson. Each box was checked at least 3X during the nesting season. A total of **122** bluebirds fledged. Other nests included 30 Tree Swallow and 6 House Wren. A total of 129 bluebirds and 118 Tree Swallows were banded. Humans and weather were recorded as the number 1 cause of presumed nest failure.

**Vianne Ninness** had 1 pair of bluebirds nest twice producing **9** fledged young. One pair of Tree Swallows also nested in one of her 3 nest boxes in Middlesex County.

**Ben Mancini** reports that the **Ottawa Duck Club** fledged **25** bluebirds from their trail of 67 nest boxes in Ottawa. They use a metal funnel around the poles to stop climbing predators. They also had 41 successful nesting's of Tree Swallow and 11 of House Wren.

**John DeCloet** who had a small bluebird trail in Norfolk passed away on June 2, 2014. Our condolences to the family.

**Dorothy Hayley** and her sister **Audrey Cook** had another good year with **75** bluebirds fledged. They have **24** boxes all in pairs of two in Lanark County. Boxes are protected by using metal baffles or grease on the poles. A total of **12** pairs were present or  $75/12 = 6.25$  young per pair. Congratulations on an excellent year.

**John Powers** had a good year with **119** bluebirds fledged from the **175** nest boxes he has in Bruce County. All boxes are on steel stakes and protected from predators by using PVC tubing, aluminum eve trough or grease. John had **122** blue eggs and **22** white eggs. Nineteen bluebird pairs were reported which works out to  $6.26$  young per fledged pair. From **83** nests of Tree Swallow **426** fledged.

**Delores Hamilton** fledged **26** young bluebirds from her trail of **24** nest boxes in Wellington County. A total of **68** Tree Swallows also fledged from **16** successful nests. Weather was recorded as the number **1** presumed cause of nest failure. Delores also had one bluebird pair nest in an old woodpecker hole.

**Adriano Borean** monitors **74** nest boxes in Glanbrook Township, Wentworth County. Adriano uses grease or a metal cylinder to protect his boxes. A total of **54** bluebirds and **181** Tree Swallows fledged. Another good year.

**Pat Duncan** and **Rob Cook** had another successful year fledging **59** bluebirds from their trail of **80** nest boxes in Simcoe County. A total of **98** Tree Swallows and **16** House Wrens also fledged. Boxes are located along roadsides, in pasturelands, golf courses and open fields. All nest boxes are on metal poles and greased.

**Robert O'Donnell** maintains a nest box trail of **40** boxes in Renfrew County. He fledged **32** bluebirds from **38** eggs that were laid. Weather was recorded as the number one presumed cause of nest failure.

**Lynda Bere** was not successful in raising any bluebirds in her **3** boxes in Middlesex County. A probable natural cavity pair with **4** young visited her property during the summer.

**Don Arthurs** One pair of bluebirds fledged **9** young from the **12** nest boxes Don monitors in Wellington County. The other boxes were occupied by House Wrens and Tree Swallows.

Dedicated bluebirder **Sherry Shisler** had **12** bluebirds fledge from **2** pairs on her trail of **10** nest boxes in Sherkston, Niagara County. Sherry feeds the bluebirds meal worms year round and has from **7-15** bluebirds visiting her feeders at any one time. Greased poles and daily monitoring keep the predators at bay. House Sparrow control is also practiced. Keep up the good work Sherry.

**Anne Melady** monitors **63** nest boxes in Huron Perth Counties but has so far been unsuccessful at attracting blue-

birds. She did have good success with Tree Swallows with **28** successful nests.

Long time member and bluebirder **Henry Bauer** fledged **14** bluebirds from his trail of **10** nest boxes in Welland.

**Dan** and **Manley Baarda** had another good year with **37** young fledged from **11** pairs of bluebirds. Five broods were unsuccessful and only **1** pair had two nests fledging **7** young. Dan did a final nest check on New Year's Day and found a Downy Woodpecker and a White Breasted Nuthatch roosting in the boxes. A total of **118** Tree Swallows fledged from **26** successful nesting's.

**Elizabeth Kellogg** monitors **111** nest boxes at three different locations in the Port hope area. At the **Darlington nuclear power plant** (**37** boxes) there were **38** nests of Tree Swallows. A total of **222** eggs were laid of which **201** hatched and **153** fledged.

At the **Ontario Power Generation site near Wesleyville** (**52** boxes) a total of **44** boxes were used; **18** boxes were used twice. The second nesting's were mostly by House Wrens. Predator guards were installed on all poles prior to the **2014** nesting season. At **Wesleyville** **196** Tree Swallows were fledged in **2014**, **56** in **2013** from **56** boxes, **121** in **2012** from **56** boxes, **80** in **2011** from **35** boxes and **47** in **2010** from **17** boxes. There were **10** nest attempts by House Wrens where eggs were laid. One Eastern Bluebird nest fledged **4** young. **The increased productivity was largely due to good predator protection of the nest boxes.**

At the **Alderville Black Oak savanna site** (**22** boxes) seven nests were initiated by Eastern Bluebird fledging **24** young and nineteen by Tree Swallow fledging **72** young. This site is located on the Alderville First Nation Nature Reserve located south of Rice Lake near the town of Rosneath.

**Ron Yorke** from Dufferin County fledged **25** bluebirds from his trail of **16** nest boxes. A total of **28** eggs were laid from the **5** bluebird pair. Six Tree Swallow nests also fledged young.

**Kittie** and **George Fells** reported that **24** bluebird young fledged from their nest box trail in Dufferin County. They also had **13** nests of Tree Swallows on their **20** year old trail.

**John** and **Janet Foster** monitor **40** nest boxes on their farm in Centre Hastings near Madoc. They had a record **5** bluebird pairs attempt to nest fledging **16** young. Eight chicks close to fledging died in the nest, suspected loss of adults. It is always difficult to encounter this when they are so close to fledging and sometimes impossible to sort out why. **All boxes have predator protection.** A total of **125** Tree Swallows fledged from **32** nests. Still a very good year.

**Ruthven National Park** near Cayuga is the location of a very successful nest box trail of **175** nest boxes that are monitored by Christine Madliger and Chris Harris. This is also the site of a bird banding operation run by Rick Ludkin and

Nancy Furber. Christine and Chris banded 645 Tree Swallows (77 adults and 568 nestlings). Of the nestlings, 560 fledged. A total of 51 bluebirds were banded. Of those, 50 Eastern Bluebird nestlings fledged. Some late bluebird nests were not included in this total. Most boxes are paired and all have cone guards with greased poles.

**Dennis and Gwen Lewington** maintain a trail of 86 boxes in Bruce County. A total of **101** Eastern Bluebirds (from 21 pairs), **156** Tree Swallows and 16 House wrens fledged from this trail. Dennis uses mud room nest boxes that were designed and built by George Coker. This was their 27th year maintaining this trail. All poles are greased. Weather was indicated as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure.

**Kelly Person** had one pair of bluebirds nest twice, fledging **6** young from 10 eggs on her 2 nest box trail in Norfolk County.

Long time bluebirder and OEBS member **Elwood Jones** had another successful year with **63** bluebirds fledged from his trail of 90 nest boxes in Northumberland County. A total of 93 eggs were laid by the 12 pairs of bluebirds. This represents 5.25 young fledged per pair- a very respectful number. Elwood checks his 25 year old trail every 10 days.

**David and Sharon Turner** fledged **37** bluebirds from their trail of 42 nest boxes in Grey County. Six pairs were represented which is 6.17 young fledged per pair-excellent. Of 49 eggs 10 were white. This trail has been maintained for 31 years. **Twenty** Tree Swallow nests and four of House Wren were also successful. Weather was indicated as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure.

**Dan Welsh** manages **442** nest boxes in an area near Freelon and HWY no 6 north of Hamilton. He had a very successful year with **332** fledged bluebirds from 83 nests. Fifty five pairs were counted on this trail which is (332/55) 6.04 fledged young per pair. **He also remarked that it was one of the most successful years ever for Tree Swallows.** Dan can tell us all about at the AGM on March 14th when he gets back from his 4 month vacation in Florida.

**David Hampton** estimates that **103** bluebirds fledged from his trail of 63 nest boxes in Dufferin County. He also had 12 nests of Tree Swallow, 4 of house wren and 1 of Black Capped Chickadee.

**Bryan Wyatt** manages 160 nest boxes at the Guelph arboretum (87) and the Turfgrass Institute site (73) in Guelph. Other commitments kept Bryan from fully monitoring the boxes in 2014. He was still able to band 8 bluebirds and 129 Tree Swallows. Bryan banded 42 bluebirds and 332 Tree Swallows in 2013.

**Mary Anne Rose** and **Karen Tufford** manage a trail of 60 nest boxes in East Brant County. Both are on the executive of the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society. A total of **39** bluebirds from 6 pairs and **152** Tree Swallows from 35 pairs

fledged from these boxes. Bluebird numbers were the same as 2013 but Tree Swallows increased from 114 to 152. Mary Anne hopes to increase her side of the trail in 2015. All boxes are predator protected and House Sparrow control is practiced. Overall a very successful year.

**Merri-Lee Metzger** manages 62 nest boxes in the Counties of Waterloo Wellington plus 12 others that are monitored by landowners and the results sent to her. Monitoring was carried out once weekly from May 28-August 9. These boxes were formerly part of **Ken Reger's** 338 nest box trail. A total of **78** bluebirds fledged from 16 pairs, 97 eggs were laid. Predator protection involves the use of tubes around poles and Sparrow Spookers. This is a new route for Merri-lee as **Monika Pieper Landoni** has taken over Merri-Lee's old trail from 2013. A total of 133 Tree Swallows also fledged. House Sparrows and Weather were recorded as the #1 and #2 presumed cause of nest failure on both trails. **More helpers are needed to monitor boxes on Ken Reger's former trail. If interested contact the bluebird society.**

**Monika Pieper Landoni** fledged **42** young from 76 eggs on Merri-Lee's old trail of 43 boxes. **Thirteen** nests of tree Swallow were also successful. House sparrows nests were removed and Monika intends to move boxes that are too close to barns for next year.

**Vicky Eaton** and **Margaret Kalogeropoulos** manage a 14 year old trail of 120 nest boxes in Short Hills Provincial Park. This trail in Niagara was formerly started and managed by **Felix Ventresca** and **Aurelio Munoz**. This trail fledged **95** bluebirds (from 21 pairs), **250** Tree Swallows, 46 House Wrens and 15 Black Capped chickadees in 2014. Boxes were monitored weekly and baffles are used to stop climbing predators. Bluebirds remained in the park all winter. Weather was recorded as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure.

**Wayne** and **Linda Buck** fledged **14** bluebirds from their trail of 39 nest boxes in Perth and Waterloo Counties. They also fledged **11** nests of Tree Swallows and had 2 natural cavity nesting's of bluebirds. Wayne and Linda have faithfully looked after the registration table at our annual meetings since the society's inception and served on the executive board for many years.

**Herb Furniss** in Victoria County had one of his best years with **145** fledged bluebirds from 59 nest boxes and 155 eggs laid. Many of Herb's boxes are on the Carden Plain. He has managed a bluebird trail for 37 years, 28 years on the Carden Plain. Weather was recorded as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure.

**Patricia Burgon** did not attract any bluebirds but did have **5** successful nests of Tree Swallows.

**Peggy Howden** in Northumberland County was not able to attract any bluebirds to nest but did manage to fledge **one** nest of Tree Swallows, **one** of House Wrens and **two** of Black Capped Chickadees.

**John Balga** in Essex County fledged 6 bluebirds from 1 pair and had 2 successful nests of Tree Swallows in the other. John uses grease on his poles to prevent predation.

**Don Wills** in Brant County had 573 bluebirds fledge from 93 pairs. (6.16 Young fledged per pair) Don had 326 functional Tree Swallow nests producing approximately 5 young per nest. He commented that it was his best year ever for Tree Swallows. Don also had a record 32 Prothonotary Warblers fledge from his boxes in Norfolk County by Lake Erie- see last newsletter for a summary. He also had 2 nests of Kestrels and 40-50 nests of house Wrens. Don also has 80 Wood Duck nest boxes . Not a bad year.

The 62 nest box trail of **Lucille Coleman**, 2013 conservation award recipient, produced 86 Bluebirds, 133 Tree Swallows and 7 black Capped Chickadees. The trail is located in south rural Niagara Falls. Predator control is carried out during the weekly monitoring. Approximately mid-way through the nesting season **Jessica Hale** assumed responsibility for the maintenance and management of this trail. She has agreed enthusiastically to take over Lucille's trail. Thanks to both for their efforts.

**Fern Hill School** in Burlington had a very successful year with 13 bluebirds, 56 Tree Swallows and 6 House Wrens fledge from their trail of 17 nest boxes. This trail is monitored by teacher outdoor educator **Joanne Fleet**. All boxes are on T-bars and greased to prevent climbing predators. House wrens removed 9 bluebird eggs from 2 nests.

Volunteer **Anne McLagan** monitored the nest boxes of *The rare Charitable Research Reserve* in Cambridge and reports a very successful season in 2014. A total of 135 Tree Swallows and 11 bluebirds fledged from their nest boxes. Bill Read helped to set up a new Tree Swallow grid on Blair flats with John MacDonald and Shawna Craig prior to the nesting season. This was one of the factors that led to an increase in the number of Tree Swallows fledged from 91 to 135. All 11 bluebirds were banded by Bill Read.

The two **Canadian Wildlife Service** Tree Swallow grids of 50 nest boxes each in Windemere Basin (Hamilton Bay) had a very successful year. The south grid had 49 of the 50 boxes occupied. The north grid had about 65-70% occupancy. Most had excellent fledging success with an average of 5 young each. No bluebirds in these grids as they are designed for Tree Swallows with each box about 10 feet from the next one. I would estimate that between 350-400 Tree Swallows fledged from these two grids.

**Bob Hunt** and **Lorne Smith** monitor 670 nest boxes in Bruce and Grey counties. They have given out another 785 boxes that are monitored by other people. They estimate that 420 bluebirds, 1290 Tree Swallows and 53 House Wrens fledged from their nest boxes. They use a factor of 4 for every successful nesting. They check all the boxes 2-3 times a summer and have records of every nest box they check.

**Robert Odonnell** manages 42 nest boxes in the Renfrew area. They are located on golf courses, pastures and orchards. He had 32 bluebirds fledge from 39 eggs, 11 Tree Swallows from 14 eggs and 11 Black Capped Chickadees from 11 eggs.

**Virginia Hildebrandt** had another successful year with 15 bluebirds fledged from 2 pairs on their property (Virginia and Henry) near Freulton. They had 8 boxes with Tree Swallows and 1 pair of Barn Swallows that fledged young.

In Norfolk County near Port Rowan **Audrey Heagy** and **David Okines** had another very successful year fledging 15 young bluebirds and 53 Tree Swallows on their trail of 45 nest boxes. Bluebird losses were due to eggs not hatching or young not surviving to fledge. House Wrens were the number 1 presumed cause of nest failures, especially with Tree Swallows. There were 6 nests of bluebirds representing 4 pairs. All nest boxes are on metal poles. When Audrey and David checked all 45 boxes in the late afternoon (1 hour before sunset) of early December they found 8 Downy Woodpeckers roosting in them. In the early morning (before sunrise) of February 1, 2015 they found 7 Downy woodpeckers roosting in the boxes. Their bluebirds came back on February 11, 2015 and were checking out the boxes. That was the day I phoned- must be some kind of an omen. **Audrey will be giving a talk on Whip Poor Wills at the AGM on March 14th.**

## Are Shrinking Tree Swallow Populations linked to Shrinking Tree Swallows?

Some populations of aerial insectivores – birds that capture insects in flight –have shown marked declines in recent years, especially in the northeastern U.S. Attempts to explain these declines usually point to declines in insects as a result of widespread pesticide use in agriculture.

The Tree Swallow is one species that has experienced population declines. In a study of 400 nest boxes in southern Quebec over the 2005-2011 period, nest box occupancy declined from about 75% to about 55%. At the same time, female Tree Swallows lost weight–the average weight of females declined steadily over the course of the study. On average females were 8% lighter in 2011 than 2005. That may not seem like much, but females need sufficient body mass to withstand the rigors of breeding, and dropping that much weight jeopardizes a females chances of raising young and her chances of surviving the breeding season).

The cause of this decline in weight is not clear. The intensity of agricultural practices near particular nest boxes did not seem to affect the amount of weight loss, so it does not appear to be related to changes in insect abundance (although the intensity of agricultural operations did have a negative effect on the number of young fledged) Instead it may be that

factors on the Tree Swallow wintering grounds, or during migration, may be responsible. Unfortunately, at this time we know so little about migration and wintering of this species (and other aerial insectivores) that it is nearly impossible to identify the specific problems with any certainty.

As is often the case with research projects, this one raised more questions than it answered. It is only through continued study that we can find answers to such questions, and protect the birds we all love.

Sebastien Rioux Paquette, Fanie Pelletier, Dany Garant, and Mark Belisle. 2014. Severe Recent Decrease of Adult Body Mass in a Declining Insectivorous Bird Population.

*(Bluebird-Journal of the North American Bluebird Society Winter 2014-2015 -Vol 37 No 1 -P 24.)*

Proceedings of the Royal Society B 281: 20140649

**EDITOR'S COMMENTS**

Weather conditions were ideal in the 2014 breeding season both for Tree Swallows and bluebirds. **Many trail operators reported record numbers of Tree Swallows fledging.** Both May (+1.4 degrees Celsius) and June (+ 1.7 degrees Celsius) had above average temperatures. There were no periods in May of extreme cold or wet weather. In most years nestling bluebird mortality occurs during the latter half of May. Tree Swallows had ideal weather in June to raise their young.

Interestingly Eastern Bluebird weights in 2014 were on average higher than in other years. (see chart below) I attribute this to more than adequate insect availability for both adults and young as a result of the warmer weather. Female bluebirds put on weight as they incubate and weigh the heaviest just before the young hatch. One female weighed **39.4** grams when captured on May 20th, 2014 in an apple orchard near St. George. When I trapped her during her second nesting she was down to a svelte **36.0** Grams. These are remarkable weights for a breeding female bluebird. Summer weights usually average around 30 grams. I had 5 female bluebirds that weighed over 36.0 grams and only 1 male at 36.30 grams.

I have not seen a decline in Tree Swallow reproductive success on the OEBS nest box reports I received for 2014; if anything there has been an increase on most of the nest box trails in Southern Ontario. There have been reported declines on trails where less than adequate predator protection is used. Where boxes are on fence posts raccoons can clean out a trail overnight. Boxes also have

EASTERN BLUEBIRD WEIGHTS		
Year	Sex	Weight
1995	F	31.00 (42)
1995	M	30.22 (35)
2013	F	31.08 (18)
2013	M	30.54 (28)
2014	F	32.55 (18)
2014	M	31.53 (21)

to be checked on a regular basis (at least once every 7-10 days) to really tell what happened. Nest boxes that are not protected from predators can do well for a few years but eventually predators find them and productivity declines year after year. **This decline can be wrongly attributed to fewer returning birds each year when in fact it is predation as a result of poor management.** Dennis Barry came to that same conclusion after setting up a trail in the Oshawa-Scugog area in the late sixties and early seventies. In nature birds nest randomly not in a large grid. Nesting with others in a large grid makes them all vulnerable to predation. **This is why predator protection is absolutely necessary.**

The North American Banding Council (NABC) has produced a document that deals with **banding birds in nest boxes.** I worked on parts of this and one of the **major recommendations is that if banding is to take place the nest box must be fully predator proof.**

**MANIPULATION OF TREE SWALLOW EGGS –**

We have had reports of an individual manipulating Tree Swallow eggs to accommodate bluebirds; by removing eggs from one box and dumping them in another Tree Swallow box that already has eggs. It is against the law to do this and I ask that this individual stop doing it. **Pairing boxes is one way to accommodate both Tree Swallows and bluebirds.**

**There is no substitute for good weather and good management.**

**Chris Lyons** had another successful year with **215** bluebirds fledged from 46 pairs. (215/46- 4.67 fledged young per pair). Low numbers of bluebird second broods were a result of House Wrens destroying the nests. (10 nests were lost) Chris also had **188** functional Tree Swallow nests, an increase from 2013. Besides the boxes near Port Hope he has boxes on Amherst Island. None of the boxes on the island had any dead Tree Swallows but nest boxes on the mainland around corn and soybeans had large numbers of dead Tree Swallows. Chris believes this is due to neonicotinoids that are used on these crops. I had similarly poor success with birds that were surrounded by these crops. It could also be that the height of the corn combined with lack of insects as a result of the pesticides also play a role in the lack of success. Chris also has boxes for Screech owls, wood ducks and Kestrels. He commented that Blue Jays are a favourite food of Screech owls.

**Dave Wilson** in Hamilton Wentworth had a successful season fledging **22** bluebirds (from 4 pairs) and **73** Tree Swallows from 19 nests. He also had 6 boxes with House Wrens on his trail of 49 nest boxes. He commented that there were fewer House Sparrows, possibly as a result of over wintering mortality of adults.

**Josef Kral** has maintained a nest box trail (that reached 482 boxes in 2014) near Guelph Lake in Wellington County since 1992. Joe built some boxes in 1991 and started his trail in 1992 with mentoring from Bryan Wyatt. Joe monitored

