



Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society

2017 Spring Newsletter ~ Editor Bill Read

billreadsbooks@gmail.com

The AGM is set for Saturday, March 11, 2017 at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington.
Meeting starts at 9.00 am, registration is from 8.30-9.00 am
See our website for the program oebbs.ca

Welcome to the 2017 Spring Newsletter.

This year's featured speaker at our March 11, 2017 AGM at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington is Tony Salvadori. Tony will discuss his work monitoring and banding Barn Swallows in Southern Ontario. I want to thank all our members for their generous support of the bluebird society and to our executive for ensuring that it runs smoothly. Next year will be our 30th year. We are always looking for ways to spend your donations and bequests to better cavity nesting birds. Our executive have agreed starting in 2017 to give \$1000 annually to the Baillie fund for projects that deal with research on cavity nesting birds. We are currently looking at other projects that will benefit other cavity nesters. All executive pay the same membership fees as our members and only out of pocket expenses that are bluebird related are reimbursed. The newsletter and our annual general meeting are our major expenses.

Weather in 2016 again played a major role in **bluebird success and below average Tree Swallow reproductive success**. May, June and July received below average precipitation. The summer was very dry and would have been historically dry if not for a 10 day period in August when almost 150 mm of rain fell. Insects like mosquitoes that have part of their life cycle in water were in very short supply. Many small ponds dried up completely. Some of Don Wills Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes were completely on dry land as the ponds had dried up before the nestlings fledged. Fewer insects were available for Tree Swallows to feed their young which resulted in below average nest success and greater nestling mortality on many nest box trails. Tree Swallow nest box Trails near water like Windermere basin in Hamilton did not fare as badly as they were able to glean insect hatches from nearby permanent water sources. A local grower of sunflowers was able to harvest only 340 lbs of sunflower seeds per acre in 2016 compared to 2750 lbs in 2015. This illustrates the impact the lack of rain had on farming in 2016. It also illustrates the importance of nest box location especially for Tree Swallows. If you can put your boxes near

a permanent water source they will always do better. Choosing the right location for a Tree Swallow nest box trail will go a long way in determining how successful it will be. Wild berry crops were abundant in 2016 helped no doubt by the record August rainfall. Record counts of American Robins have been recorded on Christmas Bird Counts with some having over 8,000 counted. More bluebirds have also overwintered and the warm winter should mean high overwintering success both here and further south. Prepare for more bluebirds this spring.

Overall 2016 came in as one of the warmest (the third highest at 8.69 C) we have seen in 100 years of weather records in the region of Waterloo in Southern Ontario. The only colder than average month was April. The two years that had higher overall temperature were 2012 and 1998. It is interesting to note that 2012 and 1998 were also two of the best bluebird years in recent memory.

2016 will go down as an excellent year for bluebird success on most trails in Ontario but a below average year for Tree Swallows.

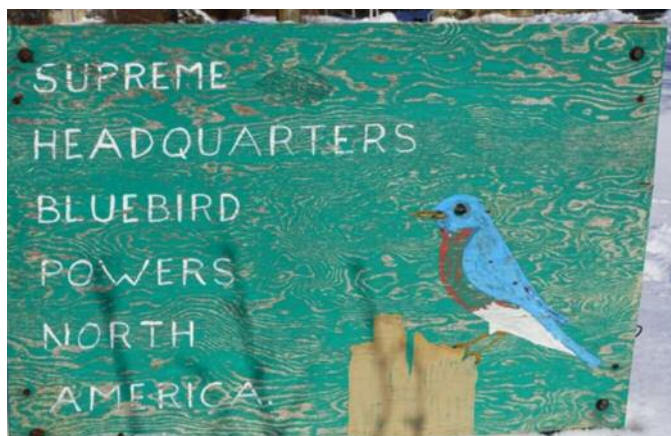
The winter of 2016-2017 has been very mild to date. December 2016 came in with an average temperature and the snowiest since 2008. One very cold week in the middle offset an otherwise warm month. January 2017 was 3 celsius above the long term average with 12 days in a row above zero, something we haven't seen since 1944. Precipitation at 111.2 mm was the second highest total in the last 18 years. So far February has been well above average which should help bluebird overwintering success.

Weather data from University of Waterloo weather station. Long-term averages based on 1981-2010 data for the Waterloo-Wellington airport.



Leo Smith photograph by the *Toronto Star*.

Pictured above is legendary bluebirder Leo Smith who operated a bluebird trail in the Caledon area from 1968 to 1995 of as many as 445 nest boxes. He is credited with fledging over 10,000 bluebirds during his bluebird days. I met Leo around 1980 when I worked at the Boyne River Natural Science school near Violet Hill north of Orangeville. I spend considerable time with Leo banding some of his birds and learning his methods which were quite labour intensive but effective. I had also put nest boxes up in the Hockley Valley area and I remember Leo reinforcing the use of proper predator protection. Leo used eight foot cedar poles that he creosoted before putting the pole in the ground. They were wrapped with sheet metal that was donated by Stelco to prevent climbing predators from reaching the nest box. He dug in all the poles himself and had to carry a step ladder with him so he could reach high enough to erect the nest box on the top of the pole. The nest box was also an elaborate construction. The locations for the boxes were mostly in the middle of pastured fields which required lugging everything out to that spot and digging a deep enough hole so the frost would not heave the post out. Leo was fortunate to have a building that he was allowed to use courtesy



This sign was displayed at Leo's bunker.

of a gracious landowner in Caledon to keep all his bluebird materials. This building he called the bunker was also a place where he could sleep. My recollection of it was that it was located off airport Road in the same general area where his boxes were located. The most important thing I learned from Leo was that boxes need to be monitored on a regular basis and have complete predator protection in order to be successful. Leo is buried in a small cemetery beside Relessey Church at the southeast corner of Mono Center Road and the Fifth Line EHS in Mono which is located north of Orangeville. Relessey Cemetery is the final resting place of another friend of the bluebird, Shelly Anderson (J. Sheldon Anderson 1909-2004). Above the inscription on Leo's tombstone is a sketch of a bluebird etched into the stone.

LEO ALVIN SMITH

MAY 23, 1925

OCT 19, 1999

A DEDICATED NATURALIST

LEO WORKED TIRELESSLY

FOR THE BLUEBIRD OF HAPPINESS

Sialia sialis

Thanks to Katherine Lindsay and John Riley for providing pictures and text for this article.

Nest Box Results from 2016

Bluebirds had a very good year similar to 2012 and 1998. Tree Swallows had a below average year due to in most cases a lack of moisture in May, June and July which impacted negatively flying insect availability. Many trails recorded above average numbers of dead Tree Swallow nestlings. Some trails in less than suitable locations (land locked at higher elevations and lacking water) for Tree Swallows recorded high numbers of dead adults. If you are losing adults in consecutive years and reproductive success is low it may be time to move the boxes to another location. Luring birds into artificial nest boxes carries a certain amount of responsibility on your part to protect them by using proper predator protection and monitoring.

Jerold Asling of Hanover manages 400 nest boxes in the southern parts of Grey and Bruce Counties. Boxes are placed on fence posts along roads in pairs 10-15 feet apart. Boxes are checked 3-4 times per year and when cleaned out in the fall the door is left open to prevent Deer Mice from using. A total of 27 nests of bluebirds produced **116** fledged young. A total of 642 Tree Swallows (144 nests), 41 House Wrens and 11 black capped Chickadees also fledged. House Sparrows are dealt with as encountered. Jerrold and Joan received Ontario Natures W.W.H. Gunn Conservation Award for their work with the bluebirds in 2014.

Henry Miller from Rainy River reports that 2016 was a good one for bluebirds with **71** fledged young from 97 nest boxes. Henry has 82 other boxes that he does not collect data for that did have some bluebirds. Warm temperatures prevailed during the nesting season in contrast to the cold of 2015. Only 12 pairs of Tree Swallows returned producing 52 young. Henry saw his first bluebird on May 16. On one of the trails he observed a magpie removing a nestling from one of the nest boxes. Magpies are increasing in the area. Henry notes that House Sparrows are not a problem, but their population is starting to recover in the Rainy River area after a recent decline.

Murray Schluter in Wellseley had a good year with **56** bluebirds fledged from 28 nest boxes in 14 different locations. He had 8 successful nests on first broods and six re-nests. One bluebird nest was unsuccessful with the female and 4 young dead on the nest. Murray also had 14 successful nests of Tree Swallows with one unsuccessful where the female Tree Swallow was dead on eggs. All Murray's slot boxes are on free standing T-bars wrapped with smooth plastic pipe to keep predators away. Some boxes are located beside cemeteries where the grass is mowed. One cemetery near Erbsville had 2 successful pairs. Murray does an excellent job and recently helped a 4 H club with a nest box project. **He tells prospective bluebirders not to put up more boxes than you can properly look after.** Well said Murray.

One of the greatest threats to bluebirds and Tree Swallows are nest box projects that build hundreds of boxes and then have absolutely no idea where to put them. They get put up on trees and fence posts with no monitoring and become food for climbing predators.

Don Wills had another great year with **631** bluebirds fledged from 104 pairs. This represents 6.07 fledged young per pair from 440 nest boxes. All boxes are on free standing t-bars or poles that are greased to stop climbing predators. Don also had close to 300 nest boxes with Tree Swallows. He said that it was a good year for Tree Swallows but not as good as 2015 mainly due to the lack of flying insects during the nestling stage and also that eggs laid were fewer. Don had 6 **Prothonotary Warbler** nests that fledged **30** young from 33 eggs. A surprise was a White Breasted Nuthatch with 5 young that choose one of George Coker's Mudroom nest boxes to nest in. Don also had 7 Black Capped Chickadee nests and 4 Great Crested Flycatcher nests. Wood Ducks were not as successful possibly due to competition with Hooded Mergansers. Don also had 2 successful nests of kestrels that fledged 10 young.

Delores Hamilton had a successful year with **35** fledged bluebirds from 8 successful nests on her trail of 26 nest boxes. Three nests with 12 total eggs were unsuccessful due to House Sparrow interference. Tree Swallows fledged 45 young from 15 nests.



This picture illustrates how a natural cavity nesting box can be made using a 1 inch auger drill. More about this at the meeting.

Dave Wilson fledged **15** bluebirds from 42 monitored boxes on his trail in Wentworth County near Ancaster. Five pairs of bluebirds were recorded. Dave uses coffee cans, cones and grease to stop climbing predators. A total of 38 Tree Swallows fledged. House Sparrows and House Wrens were recorded as the number 1 and 2 presumed caused of nest failure.

Another record year for **Dan Welsh** with **580** fledged bluebirds from his trail of 450 nest boxes. Boxes are located in the Strabane -Freelton area north of Hamilton. Dan had 101 pairs of bluebirds and a total of 145 nests. House Sparrows are removed from any box they occupy. Dan has worked very hard both promoting bluebird conservation in his area and also monitoring his boxes. During the warm spell in the last part of January 2017 Dan was out cleaning out deer mice from boxes in preparation for early bluebirds arrivals. All are predator protected. As a fellow bluebirder I know how much work goes into being successful. A lot of Dan's Tree Swallow boxes are near water which resulted in a good Tree Swallow year. Congratulations on a very successful year. Hopefully with another warm summer Dan could hit 600.

Our 2015 Conservation winner **Elwood Jones** has teamed up with **Les and Ken Blake** who will eventually take over Elwood's trail. They fledged **88** bluebirds. Their trail is located near Caselton, north of the big-apple.



Bill Read and Monika Landoni mounting a nest box on a free standing metal pole near a very lightly traveled rural road. Always face the nest hole away from the road. Predator protection will be next. Either grease, stove pipe baffel or cone guard. The bluebird society will not endorse any trail that does not have adequate predator protection.

Virginia Hildebrant had two pairs of bluebirds that each nested twice with a total of 15 fledged young. Virginia and Henry also had one nesting of Barn Swallows, lots of Tree Swallows and 4 boxes with Wood Ducks.

Another great year for **Gerald. S. Powers** with 269 bluebirds fledged from 194 nest boxes. A total of 301 bluebird eggs were laid in the boxes he has located in Grey County. Forty three pairs of bluebirds present works out to $269/43 = 6.26$ fledged young per pair. All boxes are on t-bars and heavily greased. A total of 448 Tree Swallows fledged from 101 nests with 74 dead nestlings recorded compared to 11 in 2015 with 618 fledged young. This according to Gerald was because of a lack of flying insects due to the drought. Gerald commented that the blues did better than last year because of the hot dry weather, swallows did not. European Paper Wasps are still absent. **He also commented that we need to have a separate recording sheet for Tree Swallows so we can better monitor any population declines.**

Adriano Borean monitors 75 nest boxes in Wentworth County (Glanbrook Township). Boxes are checked every 10 days and are protected by grease and metal guards. A total of 70 bluebirds fledged from 80 eggs. Adriano also fledged 130 Tree Swallows and 8 House Wrens.

Don Bissonette reports that 139 bluebirds fledged from 200 nest boxes in Essex County representing 42 different trails. Most trails use White Lithium grease on the T-bars to protect them from climbing predators. Also fledged were

728 Tree Swallows (146 nests) and 20 House Wrens. Don commented that every **successful bluebirder** is dealing with House Sparrows. This combined effort has been in operation for 29 years.

Our AGM registration table folks **Wayne and Linda Buck** report that 27 bluebirds fledged from 6 successful nests. All T-bars are greased. Also fledged were 19 nests of Tree Swallows, 1 of House Wren and 1 of Black Capped Chickadee. The 43 monitored nest boxes are located in Perth/Waterloo Counties near New Hamburg.

Jessica Hale monitors a bluebird trail in Niagara that formerly **Lucille Coleman** managed. Jessica fledged 101 bluebirds (26 successful nests and 6 unsuccessful) from 62 nest boxes. To protect the boxes from predators Jessica uses food safe grease on the poles. House Sparrow nests are removed. Jessica comments that Typically House Sparrows are the main cause of lost eggs/nestlings. This is the first year we have had a raccoon problem. Jessica is working to resolve this issue for the next season. There were 29 successful nests of Tree Swallow and 2 of Black Capped Chickadee. **Overall a very successful year.**

Brenda Ryder from Brant County fledged 9 bluebirds from the two nest boxes she monitored. Brenda has added three more nest boxes for 2017.

Linda Bere observed 2 natural cavity nesting pairs that fledged 3 young each. The adults brought their young to her bird bath until late November. She has an abundance of sumac in her area in Middlesex County.

Long time members the **Ottawa Duck Club** fledged 19 bluebirds from the 67 boxes they monitor in Ottawa. They also had 43 successful nests of Tree Swallows and 12 of House Wren. Boxes are checked weekly and cones are used for predator protection.

Bob O'Donnell manages 42 nest boxes in Refrew County. He fledged 35 bluebirds from the 42 boxes he monitors. Boxes are mounted on greased metal rods. He also had 3 nests of Tree Swallows and 4 of Black Capped Chickadees.

Bob Hunt manages 690 nest boxes in Grey (610) and Bruce (80) Counties. A total of 76 successful nesting's produced 342 fledged bluebirds. Boxes were checked 3 times during the year. Nests of other species included 242 Tree Swallows, 7 House Wren and 5 Black Capped Chickadee. There were 54 unsuccessful Tree Swallow nests. Weather was recorded as the highest presumed cause of nest failure.

John and Janet Foster had another successful year with 23 fledged bluebirds and 100 fledged Tree Swallows. They monitor 40 nest boxes in Centre Hastings. They have never had House Sparrows in the 29 years they have had a nest box trail. House Wrens and weather were recorded as the number 1 and 2 presumed causes of nest failure. They also fledged two Turkey Vultures from their shed.



This photo by Janet Foster of the 2 Turkey Vulture young that nested in their shed. They still show some natal down. The head does not turn red until they are older.

Peter Reisiger in Haldimand did not have bluebirds in his 2 boxes but did fledge 4 Tree Swallows.

Dorothy Hayley and sister **Audrey Cook** had another great year with 61 bluebirds fledged from the 24 nest boxes they monitor in Lanark County. Boxes are protected with a baffle and grease on the poles. Two nests of Tree Swallows were recorded on this 12 year old trail.

John Powers had another good year with 115 bluebirds fledged (23 pairs) from his trail of 200 nest boxes in Bruce County. All his boxes are predator protected. John also fledged 478 Tree Swallows from 97 nests and 588 eggs, 11 nests were unsuccessful. A total of 99 dead Tree Swallow nestlings were recorded. Weather (lack of rain) was recorded as the number 1 presumed cause of nest failure. John commented that we still have people erecting bird boxes near buildings, close to bushes and shrubs and put on fence posts pointing towards the road with absolutely no monitoring. Birds that attempt to nest in these boxes have very low success rates due to predation. This he found discouraging especially after all the work he puts into his trail. John I couldn't agree more.

Kurt Frei and **Peter Rea** had a very successful year fledging a record 105 bluebirds and 616 Tree Swallows from their 17 year old trail of 144 nest boxes in Hamilton (128) and Burlington (16). All are on greased poles- 88 Peterson boxes- 44 Dorrie boxes- 12 others. All House Sparrows are trapped. They also fledged 59 House Wren and 8 Black Capped Chickadees. Weather, House Wrens and House Sparrows were recorded as the 1-2-3 presumed causes of nest failure. Overall a very successful year.

Glen Keitch fledged 4 bluebirds and 17 Tree Swallows from his trail of 6 boxes (on T-bars and greased) in Grey County near Owen Sound.

Ron Yorke fledged 4 bluebirds from his 21 year old trail of 16 nest boxes in Dufferin County -Mulmur Township. He uses a double thickness entry hole. Ron had 5 unsuccessful bluebird nesting's from the 5 pair of bluebirds that were present. He commented that early cold was a problem. Four nests of Tree Swallows were successful.

Dennis Lewington fledged 31 bluebirds (55 eggs) and 156 Tree Swallows from his 30 year old trail of 80 nest boxes (George Cokers mud room nest box) in Bruce County. Six nests of bluebirds were unsuccessful. A total of 14 pairs of bluebirds were represented. Other birds fledged included 26 House Wren, 7 Black Capped Chickadee and 5 Great Crested Flycatchers. Weather, House Wrens and Red Squirrels were recorded as the 1-2-3 presumed causes of nest failure.

Monika Pieper Landoni had a very successful year with 52 bluebirds fledged (8 pairs) from the 39 boxes she monitors in Waterloo County. Only 1 unsuccessful EABL nest (eggs only) and a total of only 3 dead young. Also fledged were 81 Tree Swallows. One dead adult was recorded with the wings below the nest box. Raccoons always leave the wings below the nest box after eating the rest. A total of 24 dead Tree Swallow young were recorded. All boxes are predator protected. Weather was recorded as the No 1 presumed cause of nest failure.

Monika is interested in talking to others who question the impact of excessive intervention affecting bluebird productivity. For that reason Monika will forgo banding of her birds this year.

This trail is a great example of someone who understands that you can only manage so many nest boxes properly.

Lily Usik fledged 9 bluebirds from the 5 boxes on greased T-bars she monitors in Wentworth County. House Sparrows are trapped. Also fledged were 4 nests of Tree Swallows and 2 of House Wren.

Chris Lyons had a successful year with 200 fledged bluebirds from 59 successful nests (46 successful pairs) - 13 double broods. Chris had 153 nests of Tree Swallows that fledged young plus another 10-15 with possible fledges. **Ryan Smith** also helps out with the monitoring. Chris removed 270 dead Tree Swallow young from his boxes. Chris believes that neonicotinoid pesticides played a part in these deaths along with the lack of insects due to the extreme dryness in May, June and July. The 41 Tree Swallow nest boxes on Amhurst Island that Chris manages had only one nest

with 5 dead young, all the others were successful. These birds were probably getting enough insect hatches from Lake Ontario to feed their young. Chris had 6 successful Black Capped Chickadee nests (plus 3 that were destroyed by House Wrens) and 15 successful Wood Duck Nests.

William Ferguson fledged 4 nests of Tree Swallows from his 6 boxes in city of Hamilton, Beverly township.

Bob Majkut had two pairs of bluebirds that fledged 9 young and 1 nest of Tree Swallows. All boxes are predator protected and Bob uses a 12 gauge to get rid of the House Sparrows. **Good work Bob.**

Herb Furniss fledged 106 young from the 90 boxes (30 pairs EABL) that he monitors on the Carden Plain. That old saying “the rain in Carden falls mainly on the plain”, well this year it didn’t during the months of May, June and July and with only 3-4 inches of topsoil everything dried up very quickly. The lack of insects because of this may have affected nest success negatively resulting in fewer fledged bluebirds. There are no House Sparrows and only 1 pair of Tree Swallows nested. Weather was recorded as the No 1 presumed cause of nest failure. All nest boxes are of the Coker design painted white. Herb has plans for them if anyone wants them. **April DeJong** has been working with Herb and will be doing a course project on bluebirds for her college in Lindsay. **Nancy Hopkins** on Shrike Road also fledged an additional 10 bluebirds.

Dan and Manley Barda had a good year with 69 fledged bluebirds from 11 pair from their trail of 50 boxes near Beamsville in Lincoln township. A total of 99 Tree Swallows fledged from 24 boxes. House sparrows were the number 1 problem especially in one area.

The **Halton Bluebird Club** fledged 38 bluebirds from 62 eggs (47 eggs hatched) on their 28 year old trail of 70 boxes. All nest boxes are located in Bronte Provincial Park near Oakville. A total of 77 House Wrens (100 eggs) and 160 Tree Swallows (200 eggs) fledged. Tree Swallow numbers were down from 2015 when 267 eggs were laid and 184 fledged. House Wrens were recorded as the number 1 cause of presumed nest failure. The following people were involved in this co-operative effort- Joyce Lechasseur (co-ordinator), Sylvia van Walsum, Kirsten Burling, Steve Garland, Belinda Wagg, Don Morrison, Floyd Elder, Irmgard Richter, Trevor Stock, Tom Hunt, Bill and John Karner and Bobbi Greenleese.

Patricia Burgon had 3 successful nests of Tree Swallows and 2 unsuccessful. She monitors 9 boxes in Grey County and recorded weather and a shortage of food as the problems facing her Tree Swallows.

Don Arthurs in Wellington fledged 5 bluebirds and had 6 successful nests of Tree Swallows from his 12 boxes. All are on T-bars and checked 3 times per week.



The same two Turkey Vultures just before fledging. I can hear one saying to the other- You First.

Photo by Janet Foster

Kelly Person in Delhi, Norfolk County fledged 3 bluebirds from the 4 boxes she manages. Eleven eggs were laid but only 3 hatched from 2 nests. House sparrows were the No 1 problem recorded.

Kathy Sayeau fledged 8 bluebirds from 2 pair. She has 4 boxes on greased poles. One pair was fed meal worms daily, and came quickly when a tin was banged against a pole. They seemed to know immediately the routine. The other pair were more flighty and stayed well clear of humans and were never fed. One nest of Tree Swallows fledged and in another nest the five young died possibly from spraying nearby.

Sherry Shisler had 1 pair of bluebirds that fledged 8 young and 7 successful Tree Swallow nests in her 12 nest boxes in Niagara Region. After fledging the bluebirds left even though Sherry was feeding them meal worms. Sherry was devastated when they left. Twelve bluebirds finally returned in December.

Volunteer **Anne McLagan** monitored the 36 nest boxes at the **rare Charitable Research Reserve** in Cambridge and reports another successful season in 2016. A total of 145 Tree Swallows and 5 bluebirds fledged from the boxes. (Boxes located at -Spring Bank Gardens-3, Indian Woods-4, South Field-2, Blair Flats-17 and Hogs Back-10) Overall a successful season similar to 2015.

In Norfolk County near St Williams **Audrey Heagy** and **David Okines** had a successful year fledging 55 Tree Swallows from 15 nests and 8 bluebirds from 3 nests. One nest was predated possibly by a raccoon. Both Tree Swallows and bluebirds were down form 2015. All nest boxes are on their own property. All young and adults were banded.

Fern Hill School on the North Service Road in Burlington had another successful year with their nest box program. Eight nests of Tree Swallows fledged 32 young. House Sparrows negatively affected 1 nest. Two nests of bluebirds fledged 7 young. Two nests were unsuccessful, in one the five young died on the cold weekend of May 15-16. Both the nests at Fern Hill and Cumis insurance near by had the earliest egg dates and all had young that died on May 15-16. In the other Fern Hill nest the female was found dead sitting on 4 eggs. This bluebird Female 2571-09929 was banded on August 15, 2013 as a hatch year female at Fern Hill. **Barn Swallows** nested around the building and 10 successful nests were recorded. Some predation was recorded by both chipmunks and House Sparrows. The boxes were monitored by **Katherine Paveley, Bill Read** and the **students at Fern Hill**.

Ben Oldfield had a successful year fledging 8 bluebirds from 2 nests (1 pair) and 19 Tree Swallows from 4 nests. Nest boxes are located in Lowville Park in Halton.

Pat Duncan and **Rob Cook** had a good year fledging 62 bluebirds (85 eggs, 19 nests) and 120 Tree Swallows (186 eggs, 40 nests) from their trail of 80 nest boxes in Simcoe County near Barrie. The following are a list of the dedicated volunteers who help with the monitoring- Jean Wilson, Clare Holden, Lane Henderson, Darlene Demeret, Dorothy McKeown, Robin Craig, Liz Van Niekerk, Lisa Levez Bordeleua and Kyle Regeling. Both Pat and Rob are moving to Coldwater and have given their trail over to the Brereton Field Naturalists Club effective fall 2016. All boxes are on metal poles and greased. Over the last 7 years of monitoring 327 bluebirds and 605 Tree Swallows have fledged.

Rob and Angie Mueller manage 19 nest boxes at the Humber Arboretum in Rexdale. They had 7 pairs of Tree Swallows that fledged at least 30 young. I pair renested and produced 3 young after their first clutch of 5 died. No bluebirds yet but they have been seen on migration and one over wintered in 2015-2016. Next year could be the year.

Brenda Van Ryswyk manages 81 nest boxes at three locations on **Conservation Halton** properties. Success varied by location but there were 3 successful Eastern Bluebird nests producing 13 young. (1 at Swallow ville(4) and 1 at the main building (9)). A second nest attempt was taken over by House Wrens. The Swallow ville location by the Mountsberg visitor center had a total of 17 successful Tree Swallow nests producing 72 fledged young. There were 3 nests of dead young and one dead adult. 10 boxes were not



This male was re-trapped in the same orchard in 5 consecutive years. This demonstrates very high site fidelity. Notice the complete lack of an eye ring.

used (to close together). On the Dam side there were 10 successful nests with 37 fledged young. Five boxes had dead young. Brenda postulated that a combination of cold affecting them directly and the cold affecting insects from flying may have been the cause of so many dead young.

Five pairs of Tree Swallows nested at the main administration building and 3 were successful fledging 15 young. One pair was taken out by a House Sparrow and one by the bluebirds. Barn Swallows attempted three nestings and fledged 4 young from one nest. House Sparrows tossed eggs and young from two of the Barn Swallow nests. House Sparrows also negatively impact Cliff Swallow colonies in the same way.

Elizabeth Kellog monitors 100 nest boxes in three different locations in the **Port Hope** area. At the **Darlington Nuclear Power Plant** (25 boxes) there were 18 nests of Tree Swallows. A total of 109 eggs were laid of which 100 hatched and 49 fledged. Seven of the nests failed to fledge any young. In 5 nest boxes a total of 12 dead adult Tree Swallows were found. **Because of the dry weather in June there were much lower numbers of flying insects available.** Construction adjacent to the site could have also reduced habitat for the insects on which the Tree Swallows depend.

At the **Ontario Power Generation site near Wesleyville** (53 boxes) were all used. The Tree Swallows laid 221 eggs and fledged 151 young. A total of 10 House Wren nests also fledged young. There were 5 nesting attempts by bluebirds from 4 pairs fledging 17 young. One nest failed at the egg stage.



Don Wills showing us a natural cavity box that he is donating for the buckett raffle on March 11.

At the **Alderville Black Oak Savanna**, on **Alderville First Nation** (22 boxes) Eastern Bluebirds built 11 nests, laying 51 eggs and fledging **39** young. This is the highest number ever recorded during the project. Tree Swallows built 14 nests, laying a total of 62 eggs resulting in 35 young. Five nests failed completely. The high failure rate was probably because of the lack of flying insects due to the dry season. House Wrens built 5 nests which all resulted in fledged young.

Merri -Lee Metzger fledged **51** bluebirds from 11 successful nests (80 eggs) of the 84 nest boxes she monitors in Waterloo/Wellington. This trail was originally part of Ken Reger's trail. Eight bluebird nest attempts were unsuccessful. House Sparrows are discouraged by moving boxes to locations away from barns. Most boxes were monitored once a week. A total of 127 Tree Swallows, 7 house Wrens and 5 black Capped chickadees fledged. Merri-Lee recorded 18 dead adult Tree Swallows in all different sizes of nest boxes. Dates and numbers recorded below. Late April-3 May 2-1 May 10-15-12 May 25-2 House Sparrows and weather were recorded as the Number 1 and 2 presumed causes of nest failure.

Bill Read (your editor) had a very successful year with **338** bluebirds fledged from 190 nest boxes in Waterloo, Brant and Hamilton Wentworth. This was from 58 pairs which represents 5.83 fledged young per pair. (better than last years 5.4 fledged young per pair and only 217 fledged). I had 63 re-traps of previously banded bluebirds and 84 newly banded adults or recruits into the population. This is the highest number of newly banded adults that I have ever had. In a good year like 2012 the re-traps (131) would be much higher than the new adults banded (51) which indicates higher survival rates over the winter. I fledged 374 Tree Swallows but had 90 dead nestlings. This is down from 470 fledged in 2015. The lack of rainfall in May, June and July impacted insects like mosquitoes that had part of their life cycle in the water. This lack of flying insect food for Tree Swallow nestlings resulted in much greater than usual nestling mortality. Six or seven dead adult Tree Swallows were found but most were killed by House Sparrows.

The two Windermere basin nest box grids I monitor had good reproductive success with some nestling mortality in the north grid. These two Tree Swallow grids of 50 nest boxes each were put up by the Canadian Wildlife Service. An estimated 450 Tree Swallows fledged from these two grids based on examination of the nest boxes in late summer. European Paper Wasps, Mud Dauber Wasps and ants caused problems in some boxes in the north grid. There were 10 unsuccessful nests (most with dead nestlings) in the north grid. The south grid only had 2 unsuccessful nests. This mortality is probably the result of the above and the lack of flying insects during the time the adults were feeding young. Next season I will try rubbing sunlight soap on the roofs of these boxes to prevent the wasps from attaching their nests to the inside roof. I have never been stung by a Mud Dauber or European Paper Wasp. I remove the European Paper Wasp nests as I find them. Regular monitoring is essential. A small amount of grease at the bottom of the T-bar or pole will in most cases prevent the ants from climbing.

Henry Bauer fledged **13** bluebirds, 15 Tree Swallows and 1 nest of House Wrens from the 13 nest boxes he monitors near Fenwick in the Niagara Peninsula. Six boxes were empty.

There is no substitute for good weather and good management.

Barbara Cannery in Burlington lost two nests of Tree Swallows to House Sparrows, two other boxes were already occupied by House Sparrows leaving no boxes for bluebirds. Dan Welsh was called in and was able to trap most of the sparrows so a pair of bluebirds had a box to nest in. The female layed 5 eggs but was found dead on the lawn a few



I sometimes put orphaned bluebirds in with Tree Swallow nestlings as long as the combination is no more than 6 and they can all stick their heads up to the same height. Before fledging they are put in nests with young the same age. I have never lost any bluebirds or Tree Swallows doing this.

days later. What is unusual is that after the female was found dead the male bluebird stayed in the box during the day and overnight for 15-16 days before the nest was removed. (The eggs were opened revealing no embryo development). He took short trips outside to feed and then re-entered. We assume he was trying to incubate the eggs. Usual behaviour for the male is to start calling for a new female. A small in box camera would have been useful to see if the male was actually trying to incubate the eggs. We assume he was. I have never seen or heard of this behaviour before.

David Lamble fledged 82 bluebirds from his trail of 386 nest boxes in Wellington County. The percentage of fledged young to eggs was 59 % (140 eggs laid). Fledged young (82) per pair (35) was 2.34. David had 114 successful nests of Tree Swallows (66 unsuccessful), and 3 of House Wrens. A total of 28 dead adult Tree Swallows were found in the nest boxes. This compares with 30 dead adults in 2015. Any birds taken to the University of Guelph for necropsy were shown to have starved. These boxes are landlocked at a higher elevation which makes it hard for adults to survive during early cold weather events. House Sparrows, House Wrens, humans, squirrels and deer mice were recorded as the presumed causes of nest failure.

Another trail that **David** oversees in Dufferin County of 128 nest boxes fledged 136 bluebirds (50 pair). This is 2.72

fledged young per pair. There were 34 successful nests and 18 unsuccessful. Twenty nests of Tree Swallows and 9 of House Wrens were recorded. 136 bluebirds and 102 Tree Swallows were banded.

Another group effort in **North Durham** led by **Derek Connelly** had 29 successful nests of Tree Swallows that fledged 97 young, 9 nests of Eastern Bluebird that fledged 19 young and 1 nest of Black Capped Chickadees. Some mortality reduced the number of fledged bluebirds. The 48 nest boxes(39 boxes used) are located in the Lafarge-Regan Gravel Pit, Uxbridge.

The **Uxbridge Countryside Preserve** site has been monitored since 2008 by **North Durham Nature**. All 25 nest boxes were used in 2016 fledging 61 Tree Swallows (21 boxes), 21 Eastern Bluebirds (4 boxes), and 16 House Wrens from 4 nests. The 1st Uxbridge Scout troop has assisted annually with box replacement, maintenance and predator control modifications. All boxes are mounted on metal poles.

Dave Dewey and **Hans Vetter** fledged 9 bluebirds from 2 nests and had 7 successful Tree Swallow nests in the 10 nest boxes they monitor in Niagara. Seven are on T-bars and greased, 2 are on hydro poles. This is their first year.

Graeme deLievesely near St. George fledged 9 bluebirds from two nests. He also had 2 nests of Tree Swallows in the 9 nest boxes he monitors.

The **Queens University Biological Station** Tree Swallow grid was set up in 1975 under the direction of Dr. Raleigh Robertson who managed it until his retirement in 2008. Since then it has been under the direction of Dr. Fran Bonier. A total of 212 nest boxes were monitored in 2016. Most are near permanent ponds and wetlands. Large diameter conical guards are used to prevent extra large Black Rat Snakes from climbing around them, a problem with smaller cones that were used before. A total of 276 Tree Swallows fledged representing 2.93 fledged young per nest. A total of 193 dead Tree Swallow young and 1 dead adult were recorded. This represents 2.14 dead nestlings per nest. Most adults and young are banded. Their mean fledging success has been stable at about 2-3 for 40+ years, clutch size is also stable at about 5-7 eggs. About 2-3 Tree Swallow nestlings die in each nest per year. The population has declined for the last 20 years.

Bluebirds also nest in the grid and fledged 72 young from 18 pair which equates to 3.79 fledged young per nest.

Thanks to Dr. Fran Bonier for providing this information.

Lee Academy in Lynden set up a new bluebird trail of 6 boxes in 2016 and had a very successful first year with 13 bluebirds fledged from 2 pair. Also fledged were 11 Tree Swallows and 7 Black Capped Chickadees.

Linda and Al Thrower manage 120 nest boxes on the Ontario Power Generating property near Nanticoke. They

fledged 520 Tree Swallows, 14 bluebirds and for the first time 4 Great Crested Flycatchers from 1 pair.

Environment Canada have set up nest box grids around the Great Lakes to study various contaminants. These studies use Tree Swallows and European Starlings as a medium to look at contaminant levels. Non lethal study methods include blood sampling, egg and feather analysis. Boxes in grids with 1.5 inch nest holes for Tree Swallows were set up at Thunder Bay, the Detroit River and Hamilton Bay.

In Thunder Bay 36 nests produced 156 fledged young A total of 30 dead nestlings were recorded. In the Detroit river grid 11 nests produced 32 Tree Swallow young with 13 dead nestlings. There was some predation by an Eastern Fox snake but this has been remedied by installing cone guards. The Hamilton Bay sites fledged 198 Tree Swallows from 65 nests with a total of 60 dead young recorded. There was some predation by a raccoon which has now been remedied by using cone guards.

At the 12 nest box sites for European Starling a total of 24 Tree Swallows Nests and 7 Eastern Bluebird nests were recorded among the starling nests. All boxes have 2 inch openings. Thanks to **Glenn Barrett** and **Pam Martin** who coordinate this study out of Environment Canada's offices at the Canada Center of Inland Waters in Burlington.

Long Point Bird Observatory Tree Swallow Project

This comprehensive long-term research program was initiated in 1963 at the eastern Tip of Long Point, under the direction of David Hussell and Geoff Holroyd. While the initial work at the Tip provided valuable detailed data on breeding biology, the need for a broader geographic scope prompted expansion of this project to include two mainland sites in the mid-1970's, presently at Mud Creek and the Port Rowan Sewage Lagoons. Across these sites, the current project consists of 206 regularly occupied nest boxes with differing geography, food abundance, and micro-climates. The objectives of this project are (1) to provide a long-term record of breeding performance of Tree Swallows in relation to their food supply and local climate; (2) to provide other opportunities for research on breeding swallows; and (3) to provide training in field ornithology for students and other volunteers.

Since its inception, the project has annually supported post-graduate, graduate and undergraduate students, has involved the training of more than 200 volunteer fieldworkers, and has resulted in over 20 peer-reviewed publications and numerous theses and presentations. David Hussell ran the project until 2009. Ryan Norris and David Bradley ran the project until 2014 when BSC resumed management of the project while a new principle investigator is sought.

The project completed its 46th year in 2016. As in 2015, the project was significantly scaled back from pre-2014 levels because a full time coordinator was not involved. Nest box occupancy was 95% across all three sites. In total 109 new adults were banded and 219 adults were recaptured with bands. An additional 686 nestlings were also banded (Table 7). In addition to trapping adults and banding young, Environment Canada asked for support with feather sampling of the Tree Swallows at the Tip site; the secondary underwing coverts were sampled from 15 nestlings at that site. Some predation occurred from persistent raccoons and Northern Fox snakes (at the tip site) climbing around the predator guards.

Interim Project Coordinators: Veronique Graton-Drolet, Stu Mackenzie, and Matt Iles.

Volunteers: Mark Conboy, Bruce Harlow, Tim Lucas, Matthew MacPherson, Bill Read, Anna Rodgers, Roger Short, Pierrot Tellier-Machabée, Helen Williams, and Amy Wilson.



These boxes were set up by Environment Canada to study contaminants using European Starlings and have 2 inch diameter nest holes.

Table 7. Summary of Tree Swallow Project banding in 2016.

Location	Total Boxes	Active Nest Boxes	% Active Nest Boxes	New Adults Banded	Recaptured Adults	Nestlings Banded
Tip	64	63	98	27	64	172
Sewage Lagoon	62	62	100	38	66	249
Mud Creek	80	71	89	44	89	265
Total	206	196	95	109	213	686

Bruce Murphy coordinates a nest box trail of 268 nest boxes in the **Timiskaming area**. This area is in Ontario’s clay belt, lots of farming of dairy and grain. Ideal for bluebirds. Bruce is also the master bander at the Hilliardton Marsh Research and Education Centre. Recorded from the boxes were 135 successful Tree Swallow nests and 17 Eastern Bluebird nests. Nest boxes are located at four different sewage lagoons, 1 in New Liskeard, 2 in North Cobalt and 1 in Englehart. Some of the boxes are also located on fence posts along hwy 569 where most of the bluebirds nested. Close to 60 boxes are located at Hilliardton marsh. All nest boxes at Hilliardton marsh and the sewage lagoons are put on T-bars. Bruce told me an interesting story about raccoons. Apparently as the story goes some well meaning individuals from Toronto brought up 40 raccoons in cages and released them in the Timiskaming area in the late eighties. This has contributed to a small raccoon population that so far has not caused significant predation of the boxes. Human emotion plays a big part in wildlife decisions. House Sparrows have been a problem at one of the local public schools where Joanne Murphy teaches and has set up some nest boxes.

Ruthven National Park near Cayuga is the location of a very successful nest box trail of 170 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 had a baby boy Elliot Clifford Harris on December 23, 2016. Monitoring was intermittent in 2016 so the results are estimates based on last years success.

Mary Anne Rose increased her trail to 86 nest boxes in 7 different locations that covers 4 concessions in South Brant County. **Karen Tufford** has some of her own boxes and assists Mary Anne. Ten pairs of bluebirds fledged 71 young (this includes 1 natural pair that nested in a chestnut tree beside Karen’s house) and 234 Tree Swallows. Bluebirds have been seen and heard throughout the winter. Mary Anne also had 3 of her Wood Duck boxes occupied, 2 with Hooded Mergansers and 1 with Wood Ducks. Both Mary Anne and Karen are on our Board of Directors.

Ginny Pearce had 2 successful nests of bluebirds fledging 9 young. She also had one nest of Tree Swallows. Her two boxes are located in Hamilton Wentworth. House Sparrows were noted as a problem.



This photo of a banded male was taken by Dave Iluck in Bronte Provincial park. Bronte Park always has over wintering bluebirds.

What Factors Affect Our House Sparrow Management Decisions?

Experienced bluebirders know that one of the keys to successful bluebird management is effective House Sparrow management. A bluebird monitor must decide between three approaches to House Sparrow management : no control, non-lethal control, or lethal control. A recent study sent questionnaires to participants in nest box monitoring projects to determine the factors that go into this decision.

Professional wildlife managers approach wildlife management decisions primarily by using facts- they analyze data and review the results of scientific studies done by their peers. Bluebird monitors and other citizen scientists also use facts to inform their decisions, but their decisions are greatly influenced by emotions. And in the case of bluebird management, emotions can run high, in part because of the powerful events involved; birth, growth, life and death. In particular, emotions run high when bluebird monitors have experienced firsthand the death and destruction caused by House Sparrows. Bluebirders in that category were more likely to endorse a combination of lethal and non-lethal control (as opposed to non-lethal only and no control at all) than were bluebirders who never witnessed House Sparrow damage.

The researchers who distributed the questionnaire concluded that the best way to influence citizens to act on behalf of wildlife would be to employ a two pronged approach: appeal to logic and appeal to emotions. Those of you who speak or write on behalf of bluebirds probably know this already, but it is good information to keep in mind when your goal is to motivate newcomers.

By the way, based on the questionnaire, the control methods used by bluebird monitors (and the percentage reporting that they had used the method) were: removing House Sparrow nests (86%), destroying house Sparrow eggs (69%), trapping and killing house Sparrows (46%), relocating the nest box or changing to a different type (46%), installing repelling devices (e.g. sparrow spookers; 36%), installing hole restrictors (34%), and shooting house Sparrows (21%).

Lincoln R.Lawson, Carren B.Cooper, and Mark E.Hauber. 2015. Emotions as Drivers of Wildlife Stewardship Behaviour: Examining Citizen Science Nest Monitors Responses to Invasive House Sparrows. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* [http://dx.org/10.1080/10871209](http://dx.org/10.1080/10871209.2015.1086933). 2015. 1086933.

This Article excerpted from the *Bluebird* Winter 2016-2017 Vol.39 No. 1

EDITORS NOTE. Dealing properly with House Sparrows will determine how successful your trail will be.

Are European Starlings Responsible for Woodpecker Population Declines?

The European Starling was introduced into North America in the 1800's and quickly spread across the continent. It owes it's success to its adaptability, broad diet and assertiveness in obtaining nest cavities. It is this final trait that has caused the starling to be implicated in population declines of some of our native woodpecker species. But the situation is not nearly as it appears.

Starlings are known to appropriate nest cavities from woodpeckers – this behaviour has been documented numerous times. Starling pairs search for a woodpecker hard at work excavating a cavity, and will wait patiently until the cavity is completed (usually) before the woodpeckers have laid eggs. When the woodpeckers leave the area to search for food, the starlings move in. They lay claim to the cavity by occupying it and refusing to budge. Their sharp beaks, aggressiveness and persistence deter all but the most determined woodpeckers.

Interestingly, some aspects of woodpecker behaviour work against them in defending the nest site. In some woodpecker species, defense of the nest is sex based, with the male woodpecker only battling with a male intruder (such as another male woodpecker), and the female only battling with a female intruder. But because male and female starlings look alike, and are all black (i.e. without a red crest or other red marking on the male, as is often found on male woodpeckers), the male woodpecker apparently views both intruding starlings as females, and lets his partner do all the fighting. These two against one contests often go to the starlings.

This ability of starlings to take over nest sites from woodpeckers is not universal, and some woodpeckers are quite ca-



White eggs are found in 2-3% of Eastern Bluebird nests.

pable of successfully defending their homes against starlings. And for the woodpeckers that are less successful, such as Northern Flickers and Red Headed Woodpeckers, starlings are probably not a significant factor in population declines. For one thing, starlings prefer nesting in isolated trees, with easy access to areas of low vegetation (such as closed-cropped pastures or suburban lawns), whereas woodpeckers prefer to nest in forest interiors dense with trees.

Instead, natural and human-caused changes in forest conditions are more to blame for woodpecker declines. Trees killed by Dutch Elm disease in the mid 1900's provided an abundance of nest sites for woodpeckers, but as those dead trees fell or were removed the surplus of nest sites disappeared and woodpecker populations declined. Misguided forest management activities also reduce available habitat, including “ clearing and fragmentation of forests to monocultures of economically important tree species, short-rotation forestry that harvest trees at their prime economic value, restriction of fire where fire is essential, ... and removal of dead wood from parks, fence rows and residential areas.”

Even though starlings are not native to North America, and do sometimes displace native woodpeckers from nest sites, they should not be unfairly vilified and blamed for declining woodpecker populations.

Jerome A. Jackson and Bette J.S. Jackson. 2016. Dynamics of Woodpecker-Common Starling Interactions: A Comparison of Old World and New World Species and Populations. *Ornis Hungarica* 24:1-41.

EDITORS NOTE Populations of European Starlings peaked in the early 1950's at a time when Red Headed Woodpeckers were a common species in Ontario. This is also the time when shotgun shoots were organized to shoot starlings out of the old elm trees in Gore Park in downtown Hamilton.

This Article excerpted from the *Bluebird* Summer Vol.37 No. 3.