

Essex County Field Naturalists' Club's
2018 Bluebird Committee Report

2018 was a good year, for the Eastern Bluebirds in Essex County. Local Bluebird Monitors counted 24 successful pairs of Bluebirds, which produced 121 fledglings. That is an increase from 2017, when we recorded 22 successful pairs, with 101 fledglings. In May of 2017, there was a long cool rainy spell which lasted a few days. Many nestling Bluebirds died during that cool spell, which brought the 2017 production numbers down. The weather, in the 2018 nesting season was good, which contributed to good Bluebird production. Good weather, good monitoring, sturdy birdhouses, and House Sparrow control are all factors that contribute to successful Bluebird production.

NEW BIRDHOUSES. ...In the early months of 2018, I built 16 new birdhouses. Most were used to replaced old, damaged houses. Three were set up on new locations. The Poisson's, Santarrosa's, O'Neil's, Woodiwiss', Grosso's, Altenhof's, Coulter Road, and Tuckette Farm all received one or more new birdhouses. Half of these new houses hosted at least one brood of Bluebirds! Thanks to the 'Winter Work Crew' (Joan Affleck, Charlie Farough, and Monica Poisson) who helped set up these new houses, and prepare the trails for the nesting season.

NEWS FROM THE TRAILS

Chickadees!. ...In early Summer, Alex and Shirley Michinski observed a pair of Black-capped Chickadees visiting one of their houses. A brood of Chickadees had recently fledged from this house. The pair of Chickadees settled into this house, built a nest, and laid seven eggs. Only two of these eggs hatched. The two young Chickadees grew well, and fledged successfully. This a 'First' for the Michinski's and our Bluebird Committee. It's the first time we had a brood of Chickadees fledge successfully from one of our houses. In the past, we had two records of Chickadee nests in our houses. Unfortunately, both of these nests were not successful.

Blue Roof Birdhouses. ...For the past few Winters, we have been been setting up one or two 'Test sites.' By mid-March of 2018, our number of test sites had grown to nine. Each test site has two birdhouses, placed about 30' apart. The two houses are identical, except one is entirely soft brown and the other is soft brown with a blue roof. This is an investigation, to see if the Bluebirds prefer the blue roof, or the brown roof.

In 2018, all nine test sites succeeded in attracting a pair of Bluebirds. Eight of these pairs (88.9%) settled into the blue roof houses. Only one pair (11.1%) settled into the brown roof house. This is a slight change from the first few years of research, when 100% of the Bluebirds nested in the blue roof houses.

Most monitors also reported, that more House Sparrows were encountered at the brown roof houses, then at the blue roof houses. This is the same observations that were made, in previous years.

Tree Swallows also like the blue roof houses. In many cases, a pair of late-nesting Tree Swallows moved into the blue roof house, shortly after the Spring brood of Bluebirds fledged. Most of the time, there is already one pair of Tree Swallows nesting in the brown roof house. Now the test site has two pairs of Tree Swallows, nesting only 30' apart. Most pairs of Tree Swallows do not like to nest that close together. This does lead to a lot of squabbling and chasing.

Usually about fourteen days after the Spring Bluebird broods fledge, the adult Bluebirds start to the build their Summer nest. At most test sites, however, the Bluebirds couldn't build their nest at either of the houses, since both were occupied by families of Tree Swallows. In some cases, the Bluebirds had to relocate, to build their Summer nest. In other cases, the adult Bluebirds waited for the older brood of Tree Swallows to fledge. Shortly after the last young Tree Swallows fledges, the Bluebirds move into the brown roof house, and build a small nest on top of the old Tree Swallow nest.

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“FIRSTS”

First Singing Bluebird. ...Don Bissonnette reported a singing male Bluebird, at Tuckette Farm, near Harrow. This was reported on Tuesday, March 20th. In the late afternoon, Tuckette farm had another sign of Spring, when 3 Kildeers landed in the Hay-field.

First Bluebird Nest. ...A nearly complete Bluebird nest was discovered on March 19. John Balga found this nest on his property just South of Essex.

First Tree Swallows. ...On the morning March 31st, Alex Michinski reported two Tree Swallows at his farm, South of Harrow. Later that morning, Gil Breton saw his first Tree Swallow at his home, near Woodslee. Also, that morning, John Balga reported his first Tree Swallow, at his property.

First Nest of Hatchling Bluebirds. ...On Saturday, May 6th, Don Bissonnette found a nest of five Bluebird Hatchlings. This nest was discovered at the Lucchese property, North of Harrow.

First Tree Swallow Egg. ...A Tree Swallow nest, containing 7 eggs, was found on May 12th. Don B. found this nest, at Tuckette Farm. The first egg of this clutch was laid on May 5, or possibly sooner.

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Tree Swallows.... As mentioned earlier, the first Tree Swallows were reported on March 31st. Unfortunately, the 10 days following March 31st, were cold, with some snow. Tree Swallow migration came to a halt. John Balga did see some Tree Swallows occasionally, on his property during that cold spell.

Thursday April 12th was a warm sunny day. The Tree Swallows came pouring in. Many people reported one, or more Tree Swallows, on that day. In the late afternoon, eight Tree Swallow were inspecting the birdhouses at Tuckette farm. A few people also reported their first Purple Martin on that day.

Unfortunately, April 14th was cool, with rain most of the day. On April 15th, Winter returned. The next few days saw freezing temperatures, snow, sleet and freezing rain. The weather began to improve on April 19th. (Day of the Earth-quake!) Unfortunately, the cold spell proved to be too much for some Tree Swallows. Over the next few days, there were reports of dead Tree Swallows in some of the houses. Every few years, we loose some Tree Swallows, due to long cold periods in April.

There were many reports of Tree Swallows here in Essex County in mid-October. Through late October and early November Tree Swallows were observed at Holiday Beach Conservation area, some-times several in one day. On Saturday, November 3rd, eight Tree Swallows were reported, again at Holiday Beach C.A.

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THANK YOU to everyone involved in Bluebird and Tree Swallow Conservation, here in Essex County, Ont. People help our Bluebird Committee in different ways, such as...

- Volunteering their time.
- Financial contributions. (Charitable Tax Receipts provided.)
- Monitoring a Bluebird trail.
- Donations of lumber and hardware. (Charitable Tax Receipts provided, based on your receipt.)

The population of Eastern Bluebirds, here in Essex County, is very small, but it is holding on! Thanks to everyone involved, in this labour of love! Sincerely, Don Bissonnette