

FOCUS ON CITIZEN SCIENCE • VOLUME 13, NO. 1

NESTWATCH DIGEST

NESTING SEASON 2016

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



This annual report is a celebration of all that we have accomplished in the past year, with you as our partner. This past year brought lots of activity for the NestWatch staff, including designing a new mobile app for data entry (see page 14), welcoming a new web developer to the team, and creating two new printed guides that will be available this spring. In 2016, NestWatch bulk-uploaded 708 nest records, fulfilled 7 requests for data from researchers interested in NestWatch reports, and presented forthcoming research at two major scientific conferences. Website traffic increased by nearly 200%, a sign that we are connecting with many new people. By all measures, you made 2016 a huge success!

We hope you enjoy this edition of the *NestWatch Digest*, featuring news and data highlights from the 2016 breeding season. Thank you for your contributions to science, and happy NestWatching. ●

Cover: Eastern Bluebird with young by Deborah Bifulco
Below: Great Egrets by John Sink
Above right: Warbling Vireos by Patricia Barry



Focus on Citizen Science is a publication highlighting the contributions of citizen scientists. This issue, *NestWatch Digest*, is brought to you by Nestwatch, a research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The NestWatch project is made possible by the efforts and support of thousands of citizen scientists.

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Join NestWatch!

Anyone, anywhere, who finds a nest is welcome to join. Help scientists monitor nesting birds while you support bird conservation in your own community. To join, visit NestWatch.org and get certified as a nest monitor. Certification is free and ensures that nest monitoring activities follow our code of conduct designed to protect birds and their nests.

The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology

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NestWatcher Makes Discovery

BY ROBYN BAILEY, PROJECT LEADER

When Melissa Sherwood wrote to NestWatch in April 2016 asking if it was unusual for a Dark-eyed Junco to nest in a birdhouse, we initially thought it was a case of mistaken identity. We told her that juncos don't nest in cavities, as they are known to be open-cup ground nesters (although they will nest in crevices or crannies near the ground).

As you may have guessed, Melissa was vindicated. When she submitted the photographic evidence from her Washington home, we couldn't believe our eyes. Never say never, even when it comes to a very common species.

We searched the NestWatch database to see if anyone else had ever reported this phenomenon, and found one instance of a junco nesting in an open-fronted nest box (the kind designed for Carolina Wrens). We found no other instances in the literature, nor in the historic nest record cards that pre-date our NestWatch project. As far as we know, this is the first instance of Dark-eyed Juncos nesting in an enclosed birdhouse.

Interestingly, our search of the literature turned up three instances of juncos nesting in old woodpecker holes. If cavity nesting is a small part of their nesting repertoire, that makes Melissa Sherwood one of few people to witness this variation.

Melissa's finding was so notable that we worked with her to prepare a scientific paper, which has been accepted for publication in the *Wilson Journal of Ornithology*. ●



MELISSA SHERWOOD (2)



A male Dark-eyed Junco (top) tends to its nest inside a nest box attached to the exterior wall of Melissa Sherwood's home. The nest (bottom) was typical of a junco nest in other ways; however, it did take on the shape of the box.

Where else do Dark-eyed Juncos nest?



TRACEY MCGURK

In your hanging basket



CYNTHIA STALEY

On a forgotten wreath



NANCY SAVOIR

In your flower box

Better Late Than Never

Archiving a Data Set

BY ERWIN KLAAS, RETIRED BIOLOGIST

I retired from Iowa State University as Professor Emeritus in 2000, but I have known about NestWatch for 50 years. Back then, NestWatch was called the North American Nest Record Card Program. I filled out hundreds of cards from my original dissertation work at the University of Kansas, but then my career picked up and life got busy. I moved from Kansas to Missouri to Maryland and finally to Iowa, and I hauled those nest record cards around the country with me, along with all of my field notes.

When I cleaned out my office last year, I found the old nest record cards and just could not bring myself to throw them away. That is why I contacted NestWatch.

I began entering my 471 Eastern Phoebe nest records in August 2016, and finished just before Christmas. As I was creating locations in NestWatch, I was surprised to find that all of the human-made nest sites from 1962–1965 still exist. I have thoroughly enjoyed entering the data online directly



EASTERN PHOEBE
BY KEVIN MCGOWAN

ERWIN KLAAS

An Eastern Phoebe egg (left) compared to a Brown-headed Cowbird egg (right).

“As I am now 81 years old, I am pleased that my data are permanently available to future researchers.”

—Erwin Klaas

from my original field notes. I have re-learned a lot about phoebes and cowbirds while studying these notes again.

In Kansas, I focused on the Eastern Phoebe after doing a project in an ornithology class in 1961. I was working on a Master’s degree study on a fish parasite. After the results of the class project were published in the *Kansas Ornithological Bulletin*, I asked my advisor Dr. Richard F. Johnston, if I could study Eastern Phoebes and Brown-headed Cowbirds for my doctoral degree; he encouraged me to do so. Because their nests were easy to find and they were abundant, I knew I could collect lots of data.

When I came to Iowa, I looked for phoebes under bridges and culverts like those in Kansas but found a low density of these structures and few had



PHOTO OF ERWIN KLAAS BY HELEN GUNDERSON

phoebes nesting. We have no rocky outcrops or natural phoebe habitat, but Eastern Phoebes are common here, so they must be nesting somewhere.

As I am now 81 years old, I am pleased that my data are permanently available to future researchers. I hope that a student will go back to my study area and repeat the research. I drove part of the area in September 2016 and the vegetation seemed different. I remember it as open pastures and farmland; today it seems there are more trees. I wish I had taken more landscape photos. I wonder if the phoebes and the cowbirds are still there? Has the rate of nest parasitism changed? What is the nest predation rate now compared to the 1960s? Is climate change causing any effects? Are nest mites still a problem? I wish that I had taken more data on the vegetation around each nest site and compared nest success between sites.

As someone lucky enough to have had a long career in wildlife conservation, I'm so glad I finally archived these data with NestWatch for future generations to use.



ERWIN KLAAS

An Eastern Phoebe nested under this culvert in 1965.

Where did Eastern Phoebes nest before European settlement?

BY ROBYN BAILEY, PROJECT LEADER

While visiting friends in the Ottawa area in July 2016, we decided to go hiking in Gatineau Park. About 30 minutes into the wooded trail, we stopped at the scenic ruins of the Carbide Willson laboratory. The facility, once used for creating ingredients commonly found in fertilizer, has been abandoned for more than a century.

I soon spotted an Eastern Phoebe moving around the ruins. Within a few minutes, I located her nest, tucked into a ledge on what remained of a decayed windowsill.

This remote nest perfectly illustrated the species' propensity to nest on human-made structures in forested settings. It seemed to me that generations of phoebes had probably enjoyed nesting on that ruin, and it got me wondering...have any NestWatchers been lucky enough to find Eastern Phoebes nesting on something *not* built by human hands?

Of 1,587 Eastern Phoebe nests reported to NestWatch to date, 99.4% were built on a human-made structure. About 64% nested on a building (including nest shelves provided for this use), and 36% nested on other built structures (e.g., bridges, culverts). And what about the 0.6% that did something else? The comments usually revealed that the substrate, although natural, was associated with a built structure.

What did Eastern Phoebes nest on before European settlement? The literature tells us that natural rock outcroppings or caves were used, ideally if a ledge or crevice could be found with close overhead cover. It's small wonder that the many protected little niches around our homes, decks, bridges, and outbuildings came to attract nesting phoebes. Adoption of human-made nest sites greatly expanded the nesting opportunities for this species, allowing it to increase its breeding range, but in linking their fate to humans, phoebes also became dependent upon us. I hope that another century from now, we will have proven to be good neighbors.



EASTERN PHOEBE BY RICHARD GRAY

Measuring the Effects of Extra Food

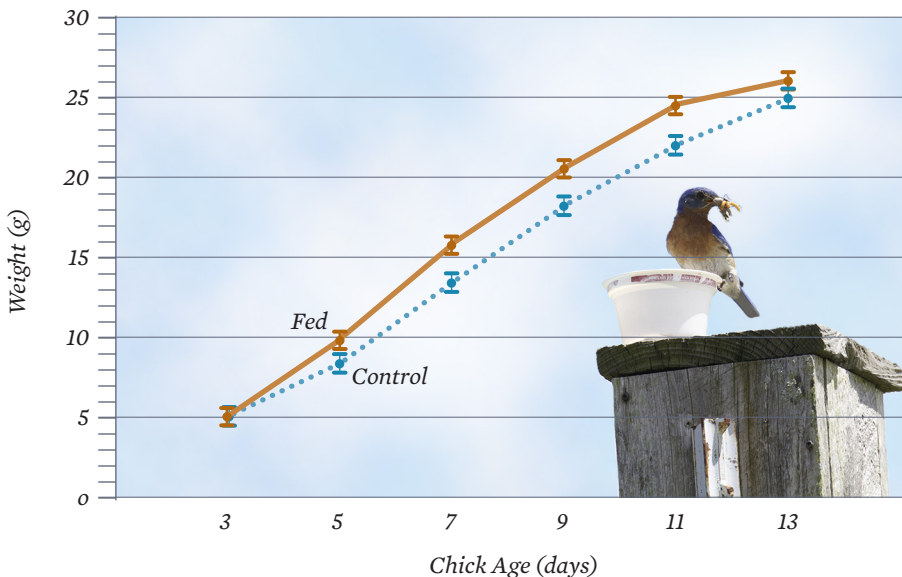
BY ANITA TENDLER, CORNELL CLASS OF 2019

During the 2016 breeding season, NestWatch took four Cornell undergraduate students under its wing who were interested in learning about nesting birds. As a part of this team, my mission was to study questions of interest to the NestWatch community, particularly questions that would benefit from experimental field research.



GAETAN DUPONT

Above: An Eastern Bluebird nestling is gently removed from its nest so that it can be weighed as part of a research project testing the effects of supplemental food on growth rates. Below: Weights of supplemented Eastern Bluebird nestlings compared to unsupplemented nestlings from days 3–13 in the nest.



As part of this work, which was funded by [Engaged Cornell](#), we enlisted the help of the California Bluebird Recovery Program, New York State Bluebird Society, and the Texas Bluebird Society, three of the largest state bluebird organizations that have collaborated with NestWatch. We asked them, “What questions should we address?”

Our partnering bluebird societies identified many questions, but three in particular seemed to rise to the top as being of broadest interest to the entire NestWatch community:

- 1** Does supplemental feeding increase the nesting success of cavity-nesting birds?
- 2** Does removing old nests from boxes promote future reproduction?
- 3** How are changes in weather or regional climates (e.g., El Niño) related to nesting success?

We started by tackling the question of whether supplemental feeding actually benefits nest box inhabitants. We set up nest boxes throughout the Ithaca and Lansing, New York, region and monitored them. Nest boxes that were occupied by Eastern Bluebirds and Black-capped Chickadees were chosen for our experimental study, and we randomly selected half of them to supplement with 10 grams of live mealworms daily. To determine whether our supplemental food had an impact on nestling growth, we weighed each chick every other day.



The Engaged Cornell field team banding Black-capped Chickadee nestlings (left to right): Gaetan Dupont (Class of 2019), Joshua Goddard ('18), Giulia DiMarino ('19), and Anita Tendler ('19). Photo by David Bonter.

As you can see from the graph (page 6), the Eastern Bluebird young that were provided with supplemental food were heavier throughout in comparison to the control (unfed) nests, but by day 13 all chicks were similar in weight. In other studies, greater body mass among chicks in the nest has been linked to greater post-fledging survival. Although this is a good indication that supplemental food helps nestlings grow faster, our small sample size from one breeding season is far from conclusive, and this study will continue for at least another year.

Our measurements of the Black-capped Chickadee nests showed no statistically significant difference between fed and control nests. But, this does not mean a relationship between supplemental feeding and nesting success does not exist for chickadees. We intend to continue our experimental study to further investigate how bluebirds and chickadees respond to supplemental food during the breeding season.

The Engaged Cornell team's next steps include continuing another season of field work, gathering more data for our study, and

exploring more research topics. There is still a lot we don't know about how we can improve nesting success for our favorite cavity-nesting species.

The forthcoming NestWatch blog will keep you updated year-round on this research, as well as other timely research on nesting birds. The science communication blog will aim to keep NestWatchers informed and excited about the field, ensuring the birds that occupy your nest boxes are as safe and successful as can be. ●



BARN SWALLOW BY WAYNE HARTMAN

Your legacy for birds

Our goal is to gather data for research and conservation focused on nesting birds. By contributing data to NestWatch, you are leaving a lasting legacy. Your financial support, of any amount, will also help us expand the program and reach even more potential participants. Your gift to NestWatch will further our work to capture historic nesting data through our bulk import tool, strengthen our youth learning initiatives, and extend our geographic reach. Thank you for your support!

You can donate online at bit.ly/GiveNestWatch

Regional Roundup

Highlights from the 2016 season

BY ROBYN BAILEY, PROJECT LEADER

The 2016 nesting season was a great one for NestWatchers. In total, participants reported 21,292 nesting attempts from nearly 200 species. And, believe it or not, there were exactly 2,016 participants in 2016 (we double checked)! In the pages that follow, you'll find data summaries from each region highlighting interesting trends and results.

Note that for calculations of nesting success, we can only use nests for which the nest fate was reported (another great reason to monitor a nest attempt until its conclusion). We defined nesting success as the



RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRDS BY TONY VARELA

percentage of nests fledging at least one young. We only report results for species having a minimum of 10 nests with known outcomes per year. We used only successful nests to estimate average number of fledglings as a measure of productivity; therefore, average number of fledglings may exceed average clutch size.

The “change” column indicates how 2016 nesting success was different from the average of previous years (1997–2015). This can help you interpret whether 2016 was a “good year” or a “bad year” for a species in your region, but it’s not necessarily an indication of a long-term trend. Two arrows up or down signifies an increase or decrease of more than 10%. One arrow signifies an increase or decrease of 5–10%. No arrow is given for changes less than 5%, and an asterisk (*) indicates insufficient data for a region.

House Sparrows, which are a non-native species in North America, continued to have extremely low nesting success across the board. This reflects the fact that most NestWatchers choose to manage invasive species in their nest boxes.



RED-NECKED GREBES BY GRACE DONALD

ALASKA AND NORTHERN CANADA: 39 NESTS

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported
1	Tree Swallow	31
2	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	2
3	Red-necked Grebe	2

Participants in Alaska and Northern Canada stepped up their game in 2016 with 39 reports (up from two reports in 2015), with the ever-popular Tree Swallow leading the pack. Other species reported include Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, Sandhill Crane, and Merlin.

HAWAII

NestWatch received two records from Hawaii in 2016. House Finch and Japanese White-eye were reported nesting on the island of Maui by Mary Ann Bondy of Kihei. The Japanese White-eye is a new species for NestWatch. Both species are non-native in Hawaii.

2016 NestWatch Season Totals

21,292 Nest Attempts
2,016 Participants
196 Species
69,345 Eggs
48,063 Fledglings



Southwest Region

In 2016, the Southwest got some relief from drought and also saw fairly high nest success across the Top 10 species. The notable exceptions were the Mourning Dove (45.8%) and the Gray Vireo (37%). The Gray Vireo is a bird of the southwestern aridlands and is on several conservation watch lists. The Mourning Dove, although not on

any watch list, is declining throughout the western part of its range.

Happily, the Oak Titmouse, also on several watch lists, experienced better nesting success in 2016 than in record-low 2015. Ash-throated Flycatchers and Mountain Bluebirds had especially high nest success (>87%), and Tree Swallow nest success was up quite a bit as well.



GRAY VIREO BY NIGEL VOADEN



JACKIE TOUGAS

This photo of a Great Horned Owl cliff nest in Coconino County, Arizona, is among our favorite participant photos submitted last year. More Great Horned Owl nests were reported in the Southwest in 2016 than in any other region or year (11 total).

NestWatcher Tip

“Checking large Barn Owl nest boxes mounted at considerable height is challenging. I created a [pole-mounted camera system](#) to check boxes without needing a ladder.”

—Lee Pauser, California



MOURNING DOVE BY MARTHA VANNOY

TOP-10 LIST: 2,696 NESTS REPORTED FOR ALL SPECIES

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported	2016 Average clutch size	2016 Average fledglings	2016 Nesting success	Previous nesting success	Change from previous
1	Western Bluebird	773	4.7	4.1	84.8	77.9	▲
2	Tree Swallow	771	5.1	4.4	86.6	76.0	▲▲
3	Mountain Bluebird	458	4.8	4.5	87.1	79.9	▲
4	House Wren	97	5.6	5.4	81.4	77.8	
5	Violet-green Swallow	70	4.4	3.9	84.7	74.6	▲▲
6	Mourning Dove	55	1.7	1.8	45.8	66.6	▼▼
7	Barn Owl	35	4.3	3.1	84.9	77.1	▲
8	Gray Vireo	34	2.5	3.0	37.0	38.9	
9	Ash-throated Flycatcher	33	4.2	3.8	90.6	77.2	▲▲
10	Oak Titmouse	33	6.1	5.0	86.7	77.3	▲



Southeast and Gulf Coast Region

On balance, nesting success in 2016 for the Southeastern and Gulf Coast Top 10 did not change markedly with the exception of Black-crested Titmouse. Black-crested Titmice, breeding in the dry forests and suburbs of Texas, experienced 20% lower nesting success in 2016 than the long-term average, although sample sizes were small.

Prothonotary Warbler, a cavity-nesting warbler that is also on several conservation watch lists, is notably absent from the Top

10. Only 12 Prothonotary Warbler nests were reported for the Southeast, despite this region being the stronghold for the species. NestWatchers interested in addressing the decline of this species are encouraged to [put up a nest box](#) in suitable habitat, particularly participants living in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana, where declines are steepest.

Brown-headed Nuthatches had a particularly high nesting success estimate (91.4%), whereas



PROTHONOTARY WARBLER BY ANITA MERRIGAN

House Wren nesting success was the lowest of any region (54.8%). Eastern Bluebird nesting success was up slightly, as were total nests reported.



TUFTED TITMOUSE NESTLINGS BY MARI MICHAELIS

NestWatcher Tip

"In the Southeast, fire ants can be a serious problem. We have caulked the small space between the predator guards and the posts, and just before our birds begin laying, we go out and spray a few inches of the post just under the guard with ant spray. The caulk keeps rain from washing it away and it has proven to be effective at saving the nestlings from the ants."

—Tara Tanaka, Florida

TOP-10 LIST: 4,210 NESTS REPORTED FOR ALL SPECIES

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported	2016 Average clutch size	2016 Average fledglings	2016 Nesting success	Previous nesting success	Change from previous
1	Eastern Bluebird	2,751	4.2	3.7	79.8	73.4	▲
2	Carolina Chickadee	364	4.8	4.6	77.5	73.9	
3	Carolina Wren	160	4.7	4.4	78.6	71.8	▲
4	Bewick's Wren	114	5.2	5.1	70.8	73.9	
5	Brown-headed Nuthatch	92	5.2	4.9	91.4	83.4	▲
6	Tree Swallow	70	4.6	4.2	77.8	80.8	
7	Tufted Titmouse	60	4.6	4.2	81.8	77.3	
8	Black-crested Titmouse	59	5.3	4.5	68.9	89.3	▼▼
9	House Wren	54	4.2	4.5	54.8	60.4	▼
10	House Finch	47	4.1	4.0	67.9	76.2	▼



Northwest Region

Reports from the Northwest region put Tree Swallows and Mountain Bluebirds at the top of the charts once again. In fact, the Northwest not only reported the highest nesting success rate of Tree Swallows of any region (93%), but also the largest clutch sizes (5.7), and the most fledglings per successful nest (5.2).

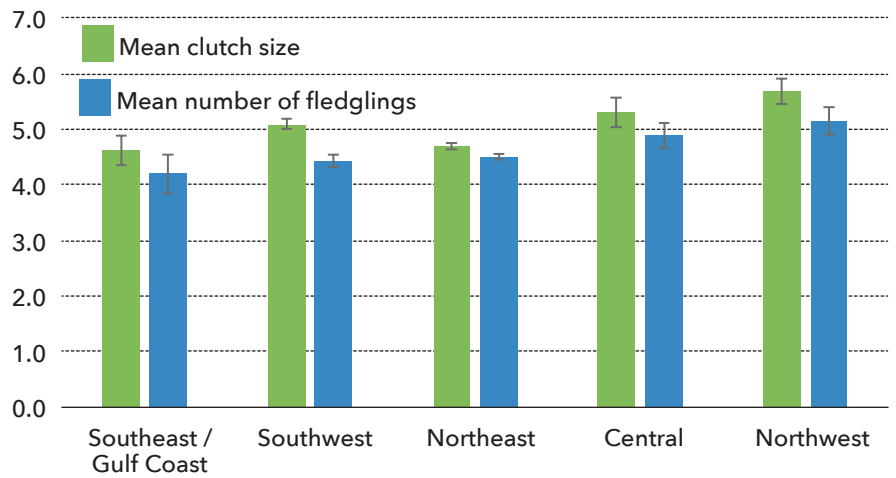
Why might Tree Swallows have fared so well in the Northwest? Although every state had above-average spring temperatures in 2016, the Northwest experienced the largest relative change from historical averages. Without any of the drought or tropical storms experienced by other regions, this could have set up Tree Swallows for a good year (too little or too much rain can negatively impact food supplies).

A downward trend in reports for Violet-green Swallows, consistent with other regions, makes it difficult to speculate about how the unusually warm spring might have affected this similar species.

TREE SWALLOW BY KIMMY BIRRE



Tree Swallow Clutch Size and Fledglings By Region



Tree Swallows had larger clutches and more fledged young (per successful nest) in the Northwest than in any other region in 2016.

TOP-10 LIST: 598 NESTS REPORTED FOR ALL SPECIES

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported	2016 Average clutch size	2016 Average fledglings	2016 Nesting success	Previous nesting success	Change from previous
1	Tree Swallow	252	5.7	5.2	92.6	79.0	▲▲
2	Mountain Bluebird	114	5.2	4.7	89.9	79.7	▲▲
3	House Wren	37	5.9	5.8	93.1	77.7	▲▲
4	Black-capped Chickadee	22	3.9	4.3	*	84.9	*
5	American Robin	19	3.2	3.4	53.8	77.6	▼▼
6	Western Bluebird	19	5.6	6.0	61.1	71.5	▼▼
7	Violet-green Swallow	18	5.0	4.1	78.6	80.8	
8	Dark-eyed Junco	17	3.5	3.2	*	*	*
9	House Sparrow	13	*	*	*	25.0	*
10	Barn Swallow	11	5.0	3.4	*	*	*

*INSUFFICIENT DATA



Northeast Region

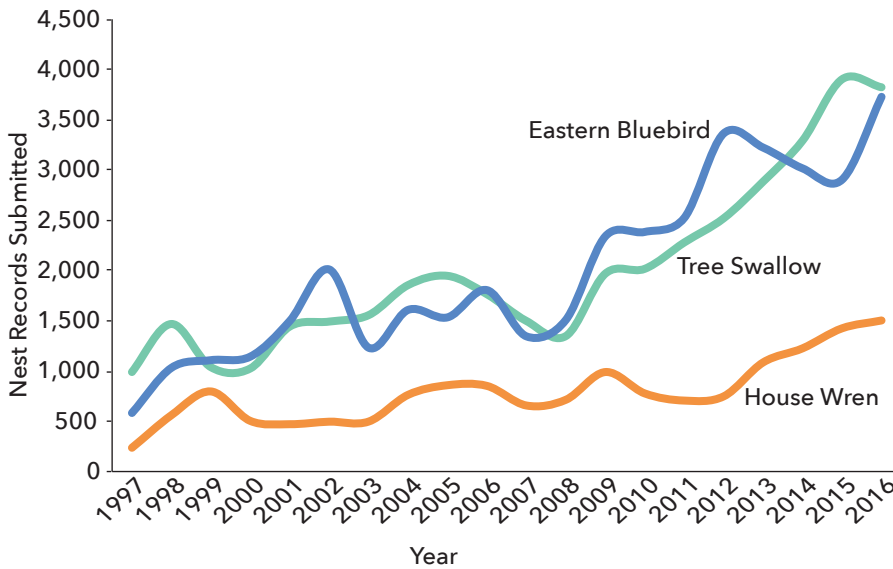
Below-average precipitation in parts of the Northeast did not seem to drive any drastic changes in overall nesting success for the region. It was also a good year for NestWatch participation, with 21% more nest reports from the region in 2016 over 2015 (great job getting outside last year!) About 11% more Tree Swallow nests, 16% more House Wren nests,

27% more American Robin nests, and 35% more Eastern Phoebe nests were reported than last year. Populations of all of these species are declining in New England and mid-Atlantic coast states. We're grateful to see so many of you documenting these birds.

Eastern Bluebird nest reports grew by a whopping 38%, suggesting that the increases in other spe-

cies did not come at the bluebird's expense. Purple Martins enjoyed a high level of nest success (93.7%). Carolina Chickadees, breeding here at the northern edge of their range, were nearly 20% less successful than their southern counterparts, a pattern consistent with previous years.

20-Year Trends In Northeast's "Big Three"



Twenty years of NestWatch data show Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds vying for "most-reported species" in the Northeast, with House Wren a distant third place.

NestWatcher Tip:

"I love Tree Swallows, but sometimes I monitor with an umbrella so they can't swoop so close to my head!"

—@BarryCountyBluebirds, Michigan



EASTERN BLUEBIRD BY CHRISTY COX

TOP-10 LIST: 12,735 NESTS REPORTED FOR ALL SPECIES

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported	2016 Average clutch size	2016 Average fledglings	2016 Nesting success	Previous nesting success	Change from previous
1	Tree Swallow	3,801	4.7	4.5	76.2	75.5	
2	Eastern Bluebird	3,705	4.3	4.0	75.1	74.6	
3	House Wren	1,496	4.4	4.9	77.5	70.4	▲
4	House Sparrow	1,202	1.8	3.6	5.8	5.7	
5	American Robin	326	3.1	2.9	59.9	64.9	▼
6	Black-capped Chickadee	297	5.3	5.3	62.0	62.2	
7	Carolina Chickadee	253	4.5	4.5	57.6	61.2	
8	Purple Martin	249	4.9	4.3	93.7	83.6	▲
9	Prothonotary Warbler	169	5.0	4.7	76.0	81.2	▼
10	Eastern Phoebe	134	4.2	3.6	74.7	77.3	



Central Region

Nesting birds in the Central region experienced warmer-than-average spring temperatures and 25–50% more precipitation than the historical average. This seemed to work out well for most species except Eastern Phoebes, for which nesting success was down by half (although small sam-

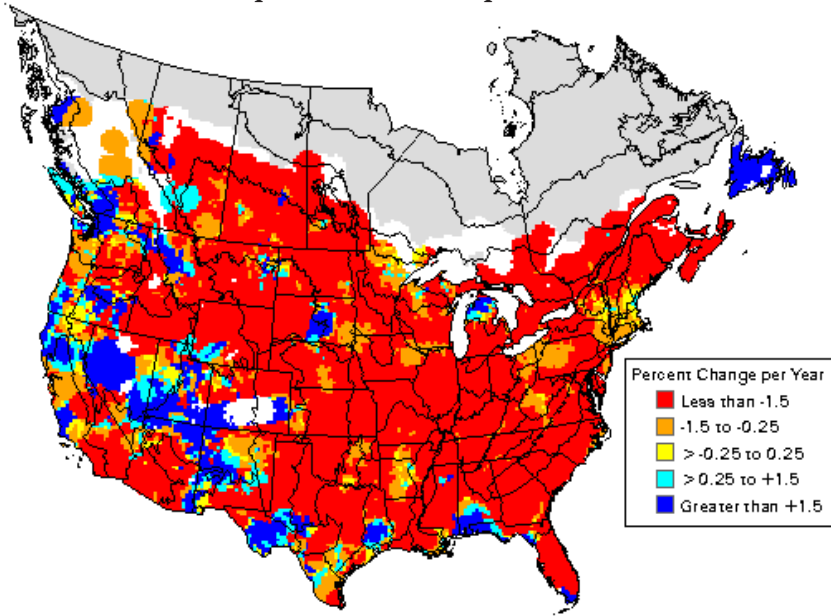
ple sizes for the species limit the inferences we can make). Purple Martins, on the other hand, had a banner year, with no failed nests reported. However, these data come from just five Purple Martin landlords, and the full extent of regional variability may not be captured here. As martin landlords

know, so much depends on local conditions.

Interestingly, 100% of House Sparrow nests were managed (i.e., removed) by NestWatchers, indicating very low regional tolerance of these non-native species in nest boxes. House Sparrows are on the decline nationally, which is considered by many to be a positive factor for native cavity-nesting birds, with which they compete.

The Central region also reported the highest estimate of nesting success for Eastern Bluebirds, a coveted distinction among bluebird aficionados.

House Sparrow Trend Map 1966–2015



A map of continental population trends for House Sparrow reveals most of the U.S. is seeing decreasing numbers of the non-native species (red and orange areas). [Map](#) by USGS, North American Breeding Bird Survey.



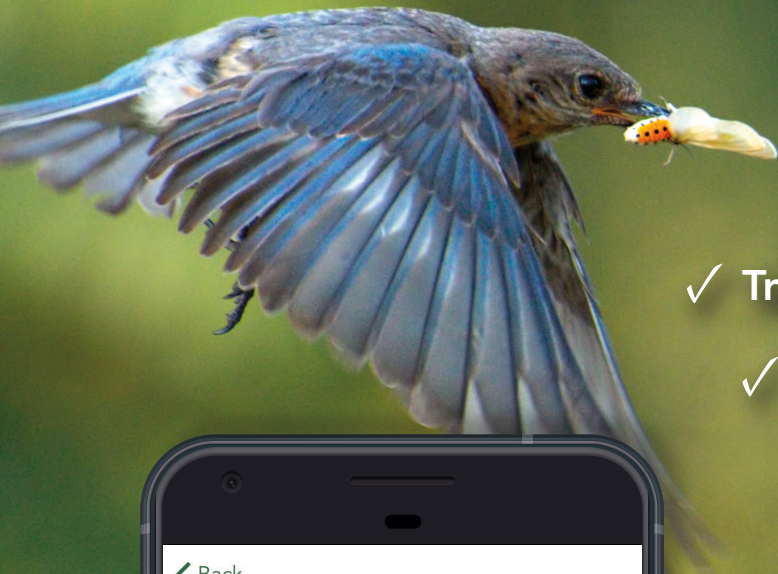
PURPLE MARTINS BY RICHARD WINEGAR

TOP-10 LIST: 986 NESTS REPORTED FOR ALL SPECIES

Rank	Species	2016 Total nests reported	2016 Average clutch size	2016 Average fledglings	2016 Nesting success	Previous nesting success	Change from previous
1	Eastern Bluebird	451	4.4	4.0	81.7	74.6	▲
2	Tree Swallow	213	5.3	4.9	81.5	77.3	
3	House Wren	56	4.0	5.1	60.9	62.9	
4	House Sparrow	44	2.1	0.0	0.0	10.4	▼▼
5	American Robin	32	3.0	2.7	69.2	73.8	
6	Purple Martin	26	4.7	4.0	100.0	83.9	▲▲
7	Eastern Phoebe	24	4.1	4.0	45.5	91.1	▼▼
8	Black-capped Chickadee	18	5.0	5.2	*	57.8	*
9	Northern Cardinal	13	2.5	2.5	*	*	*
10	Barn Swallow	12	4.9	3.9	80.0	81.7	

*Insufficient data

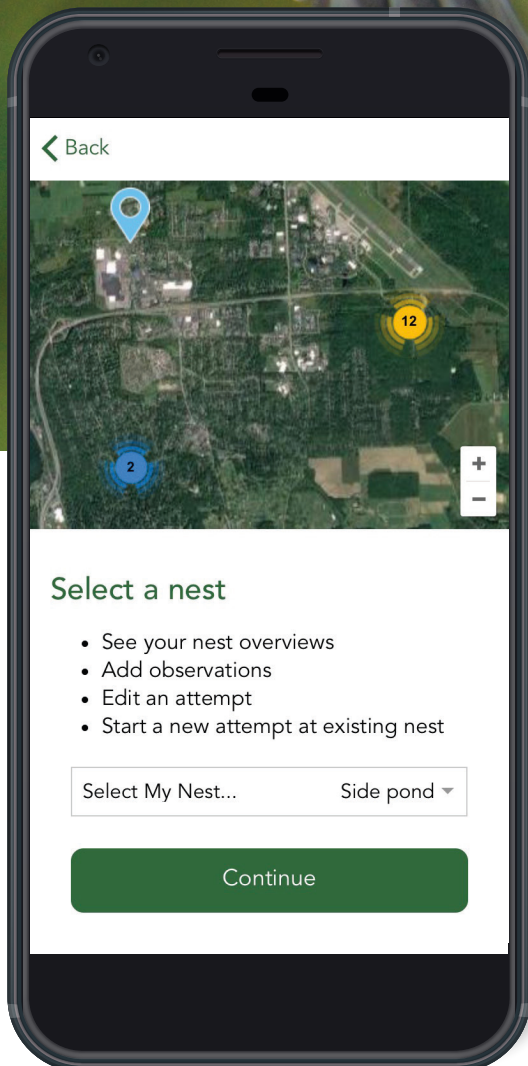
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Photo by Susan Phillips



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Visit NestWatch.org to learn more.

Lessons In the Field

Hitting the trail with 4-H kids

BY CHELSEA BENSON, PROJECT ASSISTANT

Armed with hand tools, sustainably-sourced wood, safety glasses, and enthusiasm, NestWatch took to the field in the spring of 2016. Our assignment: build, install, and monitor nest boxes with 4-H youth in two New York communities.

Over the span of 6 workshops, we worked with 88 youth, installed 18 nest boxes, and monitored a total of 80 eggs. Seventy-two percent of the nest boxes were occupied by Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadees, Eastern Bluebirds, and House Wrens. Participants went home with their nest boxes and the knowledge needed to install and monitor nest boxes for NestWatch. In addition to hands-on construction, youth learned about habitats, breeding bird biology, and data collection and analysis.

The work did not stop when the dust settled and the last chicks fledged. NestWatch turned this field experience into a first draft of a curriculum intended to help educators teach students about the nesting cycle. With the support of Smith-Lever Act funds and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Community Partnership Grants program, we will be hosting another two seasons of workshops with our New York



State 4-H partners and continuing to refine the curriculum. By 2018, the NestWatch curriculum will be posted on our website and will be freely available for educators, families, and community groups.

This year we are anticipating another fun series of workshops inspiring future generations to engage with the natural world. After all, what better gateway into science than nests, eggs, and baby birds? ●

In addition to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, partners include Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Cornell University Cooperative Extension of Columbia, Greene, and Jefferson Counties, and New York State 4-H, with additional support from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture for Smith-Lever project 2015-16-110.



CHELSEA BENSON (3)

Students joined NestWatch staff for a series of instructional workshops. They learned how to build, install, and monitor nest boxes in Upstate New York.



Third Annual Home Tweet Home Photo Contest

BY CHELSEA BENSON, PROJECT ASSISTANT

In July, NestWatch hosted its third annual Home Tweet Home photo contest. The month-long contest featured four themes: Nests and Eggs, Cutest Baby, Feeding Time, and a new category, Eyewitness.

We wanted to see documentary-style, “eyewitness” moments of interesting breeding bird behavior. A [mother Mallard](#) defending her ducklings from a mink, [Tree Swallows](#) vying for the ultimate feather to add to their nest, and a [young Burrowing Owl](#) perfecting its hunting prowess with its “prey” (a lump of clay) were among the many phenomenal stories and images submitted to the contest.

Winning photos from each category were eligible for the People’s Choice and Judges’ Choice awards. In addition to the winning photos, the judges selected a handful of honorable mentions. Category winners received great prizes including a nest box with a pre-installed camera from Spy on a Bird, a nesting shelf and a gift card from Wild Birds Unlimited, and books from the Cornell Lab Publishing Group.

We want to thank everyone who submitted their excellent work, as well as those who took time to vote for photos. Get your cameras ready for this coming July when Home Tweet Home returns! The contest is open to everyone, and is free to enter, so submit your best photos.



Black-billed Magpie fledgling by Judy White



Piping Plover chick by William Pully



Common Yellowthroat by Russel Smith



Above: Northern Mockingbird eggs by Samantha Michael
Left: Anna's Hummingbird by Eric Pittman

See more photos online!