

Article for Winter 2010 Kingfisher

By Carolyn Kennedy

Bluebird Trails in 2009

Once again hardy CCBC volunteers endured this summer's unusual weather to monitor bluebird nesting box trails in four locations in Dennis and Harwich.

Crowes Pasture in East Dennis

With the constant rain early in the season the resident birds at Crowes Pasture seem to delay the start of the nest-building process and were not yet defending their choice of boxes when the Tree Swallows arrived, some quite early. This led to a number of turnovers of nesting sites during the summer with one nest built upon another. The survival rate to fledging was also lower than usual probably due to problems adults had in feeding young and keeping them warm in the rain. The monitoring team also tracked the progress of the osprey nest in Quivet Creek and submitted the results to Mass Audubon's osprey project. Thirty-four species of birds were noted in the field, surrounding woodlands, salt marsh and cemetery in addition to the five nesting species that were monitored. Many thanks go to monitors Peter Berrien, Marie Corcoran, Ethel deBakker, Vince and daughter Eva DeWitt, Jon Rolf, and Dick Stacey. Coordinator: Carolyn Kennedy.

Results

Box 1 – Tree Swallow* – 5 fledged

Box 2 – Tree Swallow* – 5 fledged

Box 3 – Tree Swallow* – 5 fledged

Box 4 – Black-capped Chickadee – 7 fledged

Box 5 – vacant

Box 6 – House Sparrow – none fledged

Box 9 – Tree Swallow* – 3 fledged

Box 11 – Tree Swallow* – 1 fledged

Box 12 – Tree Swallow* – 3 fledged; Eastern Bluebird – 3 fledged

Box 13 – Tree Swallow* – 5 fledged

Box 14 – vacant

Box 16 – Eastern Bluebird – 4 fledged

Totals:

28 Tree Swallows fledged from 7 nests

7 Black-capped Chickadees fledged from 1 nest

7 Eastern Bluebirds fledged from 2 nests

No House Sparrows fledged from 1 nest

*Due to late May and early June bad weather, nestboxes were not monitored regularly in order not to disrupt parental care. Fledge rates for some Tree Swallow nests are uncertain.

Harwich Nestbox Trails

Bank Street Bogs wins the productivity award this year having fledged 3.96 babies per box. Teixeira comes in a close second with 3.8 and Thompson's Field trails with 2.75. Thompson's Field is suffering House Wren take-over of almost half the nestboxes and there was a high predation rate, especially in the front fields. One bluebird pair had to hang in through three predated nest before succeeding in fledging young at the end of the season. The only good news is that all fields are seeing a decrease in House Sparrows.

Bank Street Bogs fledged 90 Tree Swallows, 28 Eastern Bluebirds, 22 Black-capped Chickadees, 8+ House Wrens, and 6 Tufted Titmice for a total of 174+ fledglings from 41 nests in 44 boxes.

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Thompson's Field produced 26 Tree Swallows, 11 Eastern Bluebirds, 21+ House Wrens and 8 Tufted Titmice for a total of 66+ fledglings from 33 nests in 24 boxes.

Texeira produced 12 Tree Swallows, 13 Eastern Bluebirds, 5 Black-capped Chickadees, and 8 Tufted Titmice for a total of 38 fledglings from 9 nests in 10 boxes.

For a look at the year-to-year variability of species, the following table shows the combined totals over a four-year time period.

Results for Three Harwich Trails

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of boxes	50	68	76	78
Eastern Bluebird nests/fledge	8/20	11/37	3/45	19/52
Tree Swallow nests/fledge	13/21	20/50	23/95	38/128
Black-capped Chickadee nests/fledge	5/29	9/29	13/56	7/27
Tufted Titmouse nests/fledge	3/14	3/20	5/22	5/15
House Wren nests/fledge*	0	3/12+	8/30+	14/29+
Total excluding House Sparrow	29/87	46/147+	62/248+	83/278+
House Sparrow nests	N/A	15 (22% boxes)	9 (12% boxes)	5 (6%)
Boxes remaining vacant	N/A	17 (25% boxes)	15 (20%)	6 (8%)

*House Wren nests are extremely difficult to get correct count on eggs or nestlings.

Thanks to monitors Herb and Joanna Schurmann, Jane and Charles Martin, Karen Goggins, Don Scott, Nan Poor, Kathy Fogle, Kelly Sattman, Shirley Nowles, Nancy Hipp, Janet DiMattia, James and Janet McCroskery. Coordinators: Judith Bruce and Terry Gavin.

Bank Street Bogs: Bluebirds and Botany

Karen Goggins, a monitor at Bank Street Bogs, reports: A wonderful side benefit to monitoring the bluebird trail at Bank Street Bogs in Harwich is the chance to view the wide variety of wildflowers, grasses and trees there. It could be frustrating to try to identify this diverse flora but it isn't, thanks to the Harwich Conservation Trust. The Trust recognizes the treasure trove that exists at Bank Street and offers walks led by both professional and amateur botanists. Having joined in on some of these walks, we can now with confidence say "There's a male Bluebird in that chokeberry bush" or "the House Wrens are nesting in Box 19 by the staghorn sumac." Walking the bluebird trail is great exercise, provides data on Eastern Bluebird nesting habits and presents an opportunity to learn about hundreds of plants found on Cape Cod: a win-win-win situation. Join us!

Note to Members: New monitors are always needed. Please contact the Club and volunteer for next spring. We will teach you all you need to know and you will also be a more knowledgeable observer of birds on your own property.