



### Instructions for Completing the VBS Weekly Nest box Monitoring Form

The basic information needed for each native cavity nester that visits each of your boxes includes: month and day, species, the progress of the nest (empty, partial, completed), number of eggs laid, number of hatchlings and number of fledglings. A separate sheet should be used for each nest box.

**Month and day:** This should be the same day each week. If inclement weather prevents monitoring, the closest day (one day before or after if possible) can be used but should be noted in the comments. In the rare circumstance that you cannot monitor at all, please put your scheduled date in that column and note in the comments why you could not monitor.

**Species:** We usually have bluebirds, chickadees, house wrens, and tree swallows. Occasionally we have other birds that may use the nest boxes. Be aware that house sparrows are non-native species that destroy bluebird nests. We want to discourage them from nesting, and removal of a partial nest may be warranted. Note them under comments as predators. Occasionally, owls, wood ducks, woodpeckers, and even squirrels may use the box. In this case, note that on the monitor sheet. You will not need to check weekly for these animals. However, be aware of when the family has moved out and clean out the box. Bluebirds may move in for later broods.

**Empty box, partial nest, complete nest:** An empty box has no sign of nesting—no sticks, feathers, or other signs of the beginning of a nest. The adults may be seen inspecting the box, but this is not nesting yet. A partial nest is not complete until the female is starting to stay in the nest and is ready to lay eggs.

**Number of eggs:** This should be easy to determine unless you have a determined female. If your nest boxes are too high for you to comfortably see inside, use a small mirror on a stick (mechanic's mirror). Determine the number, note that in the comments. You will usually have two or three attempts to count the eggs before they hatch.

**Number of young:** Hatchlings have gaping mouths and are easy to count. As they grow into nestlings and bunch together, it may be harder to count. As with counting eggs, do not reach under the mother or touch the hatchlings/nestlings. If you cannot get an accurate count, you can guess the number of eggs or hatchlings/nestlings equals the number this week. If guessing, note that in the comments.

**Age of young:** Bluebird young grow very quickly and their age can be determined by the feather pattern and other physical characteristics. The North American Bluebird Society chart is a good reference. Many monitors keep this in their monitoring notebook. [EABL Nesting Growth Chart.pdf \(nabluebirdsociety.org\)](http://nabluebirdsociety.org) Do not monitor after 13 days as this can cause early fledging.

**Number fledged:** You may be lucky enough to actually see the fledging. If you don't, assume that unless there are dead chicks in or around the nest box that all fledged.

**Comments:** A lot of information can go here.

- VBS keeps track of the length of the nesting season, so first egg and last nest and fledging are important to note. Please send them to me at the email at the end of these instructions. We will report that on our Facebook page and in our newsletter. If a "first" or "last" has already been reported, we still want to hear from you. The coastal areas may have a longer season than the mountains, but you never know! It is always exciting news to share.
- Nesting disruptions. These can be predators (house sparrows, bears, cats, snakes), vandalism by humans, weather disruptions, or anything that affected the nest
- Insect infestations (wasps, ants, mites, etc) Please note any remedies you took to eliminate or prevent them
- If you had to guess, were unable to access the box, or any other irregularities should be reported in the comment box.

### **Instructions for Completing the VBS Trail Summary Sheet**

Transfer the totals from your weekly monitoring sheets onto this sheet. For example, if you had five boxes with the following:

Box 1: Five eggs

Box 2: Three hatchlings

Box 3: Four hatchlings

Box 4: Seven eggs

Box 5: Four chickadee eggs

You would count all as active nests, enter 12 BB eggs (box 2 and box 4), 4 "other species" eggs (box 5), and 7 chicks (box 2 and box 3).

At the end of the season (after your last nestlings have fledged), each column will be added and entered into the Trail Annual Summary Form (TASF) for your county, so accuracy and completeness are important.

If you have any questions or comments be sure to contact me.

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