**Filling out the VBS Annual Summary Forms**

August 2023

Thank you for volunteering as a VBS Trail Lead and/or County Coordinator! We appreciate your hard work. We have updated VBS Trail Annual Summary and County Coordinators Summary forms this year to make it easier for Trail Leads to enter data in a single row and for County Coordinators to copy data from each trail summary and paste it into the county summary.

To take advantage of this easy cut and paste and to automatically tally numbers, you use the Excel version. (The PDF version is only for the rare case where one may not be able access Excel.)

When submitting your data, be sure to:

* Add more rows if needed - depending on the size of your trail.
* Be sure to keep the last row intact (in blue), so that your numbers are tallied properly and can be copied and pasted into the County Coordinator form.
* Enter data in all white cells - including the dates in the last row. Do not edit any blue cells.
* Trail leads, remember to submit your Trail Annual Summary to County Coordinators by **September 30**. Be careful not to close your trail prematurely. Wait at least two weeks after you think you have seen the last fledging of the season or you risk missing a late nesting.
* County Coordinators, remember to submit your County Coordinators form to the VBS State Coordinator Charlene Talcott by **November 4** (the VBS fall meeting date). Forms will not be accepted after December 31.

The form allows us to collect basic information on each trail in the five sections below.

## NEST BOX ACTIVITY

For each species of native cavity nester that visits each of your boxes, we will tally:

**Nest attempts** - Remember it only counts if it has at least one egg.

**Eggs** - Counting eggs is usually easy (unless you have a determined female, unwilling to leave the nest or a tree swallow nest with eggs enveloped in feathers). You usually have two chances (visits) to get that complete count before they hatch.

**Hatched** - Count newborn chicks by looking for open mouths, but it gets difficult as they grow and crowd the nest. Your visit during that first week will give the most accurate reading.

**Fledged** - We almost never see the actual event so can only assume in the absence of any dead chicks, that the number seen in the preceding week is the number that fledged.

For **Other Native Species,** be sure to identify that species in the Comments. We love to document the unusual and want to follow its progress as closely as we do the “regulars.” House sparrows are NOT native and NOT included in this group. Any nesting attempts by this species is considered a Nesting Disruption and should be entered in the next section.

## NESTING DISRUPTIONS

Under **Known/Suspected Disruptor**, use clues to identity of the invader and note the number of instances:

**Insect/arachnid invasions** include ants, wasps, mites, and blowfly larvae.

**Invasive House Sparrow (HS) nesting attempt or takeover** will toss out eggs on the ground or guard, leave broken eggs and dead chicks or adults, and mess up the nest.

**Bluebird takeover**

**Tree Swallow takeover**

**House Wren takeover**

**Snakes** will usually take all eggs/chicks, but leave the nest undisturbed.

**Cat/opossum/raccoon** leave scratch marks at box entrance, mess up nest

**Vandalism** and mowing collisions leaves dent poles and smashed baffles and boxes.

**Bear** attacks wreak total havoc similar to vandalism and possibly with large scratches.

**Other/unknown -** Sometimes there just are no good clues, so list it here and describe it in the Comments section.

Use the Comments section to describe what happened and what if any preventive measures were taken or have been planned for the future.

Under **Effect**, specify the number of instances where unhatched eggs remained in the nest, or missing/damaged eggs, missing/dead young, or dead adult were present. Remember that not all losses come from predation or invasion. Eggs left in the nest may have been infertile (5- 10% are ), parents could have died or simply abandoned the nest. Females may have removed/buried infertile eggs or removed a dead chick if less than eight days old.

## NEST BOX & TRAIL CHARACTERISTICS

Specify the **construction**, **opening**, **mounting**, **controls**, **property**, and **habitat** types. Each of these offers several of the most common choices. For property and habitat, a trail may have several types. For simplicity, try to select the most prevalent. If none of them fit your trail’s profile, simply choose “other” and give details in the Comments section. Thankfully, you only need to go through this section once - as it can always be copied and saved for the next year.

## DATES OF NESTING SEASON

We are very interested in determining fluctuations in timing and duration of the breeding season. Dates are asked for first bluebird egg , first hatching, first fledge, and last fledge of the season on your trail. It is helpful to have the nesting schedule and an empty calendar for filling this section.

We are now also asking for the same dates for the second most common species on our trails, which is usually the tree swallow who represents about 20% of the fledging birds from our trails. This addition should help in understanding interactions between the two species and will expand data on timing and duration of the breeding season.

## COMMENTS

This section gives space for information not easily fitting into a table such as: your general assessment of trail productivity, weather effects on productivity, man-made changes to the trail or its landscape, details on any predator events and visitations by unusual species. It is also a good place to remind yourself and your coordinator of any needed repairs for the next season.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Many thanks to Alison Davis-Holland for the updated VBS Summary report forms and to Johanna Humphrey and Charlene Talcott for their input on the design.

Last but certainly not least, our hats are all off to the steadfast VBS monitors that watched over our cavity nesters, recording their activity throughout the breeding season.