

# DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Wildlife Highlights

October, November and December 2021

Prepared by Patrick McCrea



Throughout the years Forest Preserve Staff, Boy Scouts, and Volunteers have been building and installing nest boxes throughout the DeKalb County Forest Preserves. These boxes are intended to help Eastern bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds. Back in 2019 Stewards helped boost the number of bluebird nest boxes we had in the preserves. In 2020 we tried out a bluebird monitoring program with the help of Karen Lund, Joe Cassidy, and Mauren Cassidy. Over all we were successful and with their help we adjusted data sheets to better suit our needs. In 2021, twelve volunteers recorded data at 8 preserves and monitored over 60 boxes.

\*Not all data made these highlights but any data turned in after will be added to the data set.

Preserve	Number of Boxes	Eastern Bluebird nest attempts	Eastern Bluebird nest success	Eastern Bluebird Fledged	Tree Swallow nest attempts	Tree Swallow nest success	Tree Swallow Fledged	House Wren nest attempts	House Wren Success	House Wren Fledged	Non-Native House Sparrow nest Attempts
P.A. Nehring 3-6 to 6-30	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0
Russel Woods 4-6 to 8-11	6	0	0	0	2	1	5	0	1	7	31
Sannauk 3-29 to 8-16	5	0	0	0	2	1	4	3	2	9	0
Merritt Prairie 3-4 to 8-30	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	133
Prairie Oaks Complex 3-12 to 8-10	18	1	0	0	8	4	16	2	1	6	1
Sycamore 4-6 to 6-16	10	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh 4-23 to 6-12	6				1	1	4	3	1	6	
Total	60	1	0	0	23	7	29	9	7	30	165



Throughout the season volunteers checked boxes, collected data and worked to deter non-native invasive house sparrows. Although everyone was hoping to see bluebirds there was only one nest attempt this year throughout the study. This photo is of a bluebird nest from a previous year. Notice the neat woven grasses that make up the nest. Competition for nest boxes and natural cavities maybe one factor limiting bluebird nesting. We did find that the nest boxes in preserves close to livestock were much more likely to have Non-native house sparrows attempting to use the boxes. House sparrows can be aggressive nesters and often push out less aggressive native birds. Karen Matz and Jan Grainger had their work cut out for them deterring over 133 nesting attempts made by Non-native house sparrows.



Photo By Damon Lubkeman

Nest boxes placed within open prairie and sedge meadow habitats attracted tree swallows, another native insect eating bird. Tree swallows attempted to nest 23 times and 7 of those nests were successful in producing fledglings. This means their nest success was about

30.4% which is below the 78.3% 10 year average success rate for tree swallows according to Cornell Labs, NestWatch Digest for the 2020 Nesting Season.

The monitoring season can be full of both joy and mystery. Volunteers like Chuck Christensen at Sycamore Forest Preserve were faced with puzzling mysteries. After intense competition between tree swallows in the spring all 10 of his nest boxes had tree swallow nests but none of those nests ended up being successful. To add to the mystery 2 tree swallows were found dead in their boxes.

At Sannauk Forest Preserve Barb Parness got to observe these young tree swallows grow and fledge! Notice their cozy nest lined with feathers.





This first year of monitoring was a success and I want to thank all the volunteers who put in work monitoring and those who just tried it out this year. We encouraged native cavity nesters and we had 29 tree swallows fledge and 30 house wrens fledge from our boxes. As we continue to monitor, we will learn more about the successes and failures and adjust some of our transects to reduce competition with non-native house sparrows.

Where nest boxes were placed near edge habitat House Wrens and Black Capped Chickadees attempted to nest. Out of all the boxes we only had one attempt by a chickadee observed by Inge Nicklaus at Wilkinson Renwick Marsh. The attempt was unsuccessful but the nest was fascinating. It was made mostly of moss and lined with feathers and hair.

House wrens also found a home in some of the nest boxes. At P.A. Nehring Rodney Hall battled ants that continued to find the nest boxes attractive. Two boxes still produced successful fledglings but wren nests are sometimes so dense with sticks it is often hard to get a good count on the eggs or young. In these cases, nest success is still counted but fledgling numbers are recorded as 1. Barb Parness got a decent view of this nest at Sannauk, check out the twigs on the left. Many times, wrens fill the whole box with sticks which help to deter some competition or predators.

