Impact Project Report

Providing Artificial Structures for Cavity-Nesting Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*)

Issue

Northern Chatham County has experienced extensive residential development, resulting in significant loss of natural habitat for native cavity-nesting birds. This project focused on placing and monitoring nesting boxes for Eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*).

Project





Recent residential and commercial developments in northern Chatham County have removed large swaths of natural habitat. Practically all trees are removed for the expedient placement of infrastructure. These are replaced with smaller, healthy trees that lack the cavities of more mature, aging trees necessary for cavity-nesting species. Master Naturalist Gary Oakley, in consultation with the North Carolina Bluebird Society (NCBS), installed and monitored 10 nest boxes along the perimeters of several local fields and open spaces.

During the 1900's, bluebird populations decreased by about 90% until around 1970. While populations have rebounded through the efforts of volunteers and organizations such as the NCBS, the recent loss of habitat due to high-density development in his vicinity motivated him to undertake this project. Drawing on a combination of online and NCBS human resources, Oakley followed best practices for the placement and protection of nest boxes. He registered his "Bluebird Valentine" trail with Cornell Lab Nest Watch, monitored each box twice weekly, and submitted data to their site.

Results

All 10 nest boxes hosted at least one nest during the breeding season. One box hosted 3 clutches! Observations made included nest construction stages, visibility of parent birds during box inspections, and (estimated) dates for egg laying, hatching, nestling feather development, and successful fledging (leaving the nest).

The results are as follows: 10 boxes, 17 nesting attempts, 66 total eggs, 59 young, 52 fledges. (Note: The boxes were equipped with predator guards, but one set of 5 nestlings disappeared shortly after hatching.) This project substantially increased the number of bluebird sightings due to their continued presence. It has generated interest among neighbors, some of whom have expressed an interest in adding nest boxes next season. Such actions are needed to help offset the loss of habitat that is likely to continue in this area.

The NC Bluebird Society generously provided financial support for the materials for this project.

Student

This project is the work of Gary Oakley

Highlight

Partner Organization

NC Bluebird Society

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