

[From Summer 1998]

Bluebird House Survey

On June 3rd, The Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge conducted its annual bluebird house survey. The purpose of this survey was to determine which houses are being used by bluebirds or other species.

Of the 34 boxes inspected, three showed signs of being used by bluebirds, six houses were being used by tree swallows, and three houses were being used by Carolina chickadees. Identification of the species using the houses was made through examination of eggs, chicks, nest types and visual sighting of activity.

The survey (conducted by refuge interns Chris Catrambone and Michelle Johnston) also involved cleaning out old bird nests so that the houses can be used again this nesting season. With regular cleaning of the houses, increased use by bluebirds may occur. In addition, a second survey will be conducted later this summer to determine reuse figures and total use information.

In 1997, additional houses were constructed and placed next to existing houses around the refuge. Tree swallows often nest in bluebird houses and, with the two houses close together, the theory is that one house will be used by swallows and the other house by bluebirds. However, the data from this year and last year indicates that the bluebirds preferred to nest where there was a single house, or where there was no activity in the adjacent box.

Catrambone & Johnston - ESNWR