



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
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For Immediate Release

Preparing for the Cavity Nesters Arrival

By now some of you have no doubt seen a robin or two, and the multitudinous, “black ones” as I call them, the grackles, starlings, crows, turkey vultures and the red winged black birds, flocking around farms, fields and feeders. They tell us to prepare for the ones to follow, the colored, singing and lovely ones that are looking for the cavities they need for nesting. The tree swallows, eastern bluebirds and purple martins come to mind, but the kestrels and resident chickadees require the dark places inside trees or boxes to complete their summer cycle as well.

For those of you with boxes in place, there is one message, clean them out now. Boxes with old nest materials and bird wastes will support parasites that may harm nestlings. This is a good time for nest box maintenance and installation as well. By the way, one size does not fit all. Nest box types vary with the birds using them. The Birdhouse Network at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/resources/box_types/view) is a good resource offering many nest box options. While you are at the website, check out the nest box cameras that are spying on six different birds around the country. Amazing!

If you have seen or heard bluebirds in your area over the years, by all means, set out boxes, lots of them. Tree swallows like to use them, too. Check in with The North American Bluebird Society first, <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>, for pointers. If you are really ambitious, a purple martin house might be right for you. A rare bird in the Northeast Kingdom, martins have nested in the South Bay area of Newport in the past. Currently the Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas is in full swing and likely to determine if martins are still nesting in this area. It takes more than just a colonial nest box of a certain size, a specific height above the ground and proximity to water, to attract martins. Since they return to the location where they were born every year, another nest box in a different location has to look really good, I mean really good, for the early arrivals or scouts to be persuaded to stay and nest. Decoys and sound effects can be used if the box and location are acceptable. And even after all that, it could take years. The Purple Martin Conservation Association, www.purplemartin.org, has all the information and products you need to start on your mission. With the abundance of suitable martin nesting habitat in our area, I think there is a chance that it can work if enough people try.

I have been waiting for martins for several years and to my surprise last summer a family of eastern bluebirds moved in to my bird condo (see picture) late in the season. They found it very acceptable especially with all the additional space and the overhang for protection from the rain.

The four young emerged from the three bottom cavities they had occupied to perch on the railing before their first flights over the garden and field. Even though the martins have not found my place yet, bluebirds are ok with me. Perhaps a new design for bluebird nest boxes will evolve, with railings and overhangs. The birds would certainly appreciate that I think.

Happy birding!



Carolyn E. Boardman is a member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont. NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non -profit organization that encourages people's enjoyment of birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For more information about meetings, field trips and special events, visit www.nekaudubon.org.
Art work by Robin Rothman.