



August 2021

Instructions for Completing the VBS Individual Trail Annual Summary Form (TASF)

The basic information needed for each native cavity nester that visits each of your boxes includes: the number of nesting attempts, number of eggs laid, number of hatchlings and number of fledglings. This information is put into the columns of the first five sections of Page 1 of the TASF.

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

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 (2 visits) to get that complete count before they hatch.

Newborn chicks up to about day seven are usually easy to accurately count (look for those 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.

Fledging numbers: 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. Females are likely to remove any dead chicks during the first week of birth but are unable to do so once chicks are 7/8 days old because of size.

'Other 'native cavity nesters: We only have room for the most common nesters so that fifth column is reserved for any unusual native cavity nester that might visit your trail. Please be sure and ID that species, which can be done either in last column, page 1 or 'Notes &Comments, page2. We love to document the unusual and want to follow its progress as closely as we do the 'regulars'.

It's important to note here that the house sparrow is **NOT native** and is **NOT** included in this group. Any nesting attempts by this species belong in the 'Predation' section.

Predation: The next two sections deal with vertebrate predators. One frequently has clues to suggest the invader: **Snakes** will usually take all eggs/chicks but leave the nest undisturbed; **house sparrows** kill both chicks and adults and mess up the nest; **house wrens** - toss out and/or smash existing eggs; **racoons and cats** leave scratch marks at box entrance, mess up nest; **bears** wreak total havoc; **mowers** smash baffles, bend poles; **vandals with bats** smash baffles and boxes. Sometimes there are just no good clues and it's fine to list the loss as '**Unknown Agent**'.

Insect and other arthropod Invasions: Most common are ants, wasps, mites, blowfly larvae. Use 'Notes and Comments' section, page 2 to ID and/or describe what happened and what if any preventive measures were taken for the future.

Non-Predatory Losses: 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. As stated above, adults may remove any infertile eggs or bury them within the nest. **Missing chicks:** Female may remove a dead chick from nest if less than 8 days old.

PAGE 2 of the TASF: The left column seeks to find out more about the **characteristics of your trail: nest type** (almost all of ours are Rectangular' with a round nest box hole of 1 ½ in). **Box mountings** are mostly 'Metal Poles' with 'Stove Pipe baffle' which may be 6 - 8 inches in diameter (please note which size is being used as we are evaluating their relative merits.) Most units also have Noel Guards (those wire mesh vestibules at the entrance).

Trail Habitat: We place trails in a wide variety of settings, many have more than one characteristic. What does yours look like?

Paired boxes are found on trails where tree swallows are present, in hopes that they will successfully coexist with bluebirds. Let us know if that worked on your trail.

Season Length: We are extremely interested in determining fluctuations in timing and duration of the breeding season. Dates are asked for first bluebird egg, first hatching, first fledging and LAST fledging at end of season on your trail. On most of our trails, Tree Swallows rank second in nest box use. **To follow this species and their interactions with bluebirds we have added a section to give breeding dates for the tree sparrow as well.**

Special for 2021, Emergence of Cicada Brood X: They first emerged in May and remained until early June. The magnitude of the event varied greatly in the scattered groups found throughout Virginia. We would like to examine the effect these varied groups had on our breeding cavity nesters. Did the increased availability of insect protein increase their nesting productivity? How about tree swallows, who obtain most of their insect protein on the fly? So, we've asked you to let us know if cicadas were present, how extensive was the emergence event in your area and what if any effect might it have had on your bluebird trail. These findings can be summarized in the Notes and Comments section as described below.

Finally, Notes and Comments, page 2: Gives space for information not easily fitting into a table such as: your general **assessment of trail productivity, weather effects** on productivity, any **man-made changes** to the trail landscape, details on any **predator events** or visitations by unusual (**'Other'**) **species**. It's also a good place to remind yourself and your coordinator of any needed repairs for the next season.

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