

Town of Lansing 2017 NestWatch Report

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This year, our NestWatch team monitored a grand total of 141 nesting attempts for over 20 species of birds across the Lansing area. Between all four Lansing locations, we regularly checked 49 nest boxes and searched for naturally occurring open-cup nests. We greatly appreciate your willingness to support our project, and to keep you updated on our progress, our NestWatch team developed the following site-specific summaries to demonstrate how each location contributed to our breeding season's nest monitoring efforts. Thank you for helping us to research and monitor breeding bird biology in Lansing's natural areas.

All Saints Church

The grassland and forested areas near All Saints Church provided prime habitat for a number of breeding birds this summer. In addition to the nests recorded in the table below, we saw Baltimore Orioles, Orchard Orioles, Indigo Buntings, Song Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows, and a Clay-colored Sparrow that all likely bred on the property this year. Clay-colored Sparrows usually breed further west, and watching an individual of this locally-rare species singing in the small conifers at this site was a treat. A number of local bird watchers came to see the individual when we reported its presence to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird database.

Despite the cold start and end to the 2017 breeding season, the birds raised a fair number of offspring this year. The Eastern Bluebird pair raised four healthy chicks this season, the five Tree Swallow nests raised a whopping 24 fledglings, and a Mourning Dove pair raised two plump chicks. The bluebirds were incorporated into our supplemental feeding experiment, so that pair enjoyed a helping of mealworms each day once their eggs hatched. We enjoyed watching them fly out of the woods to defend their nest box and feast on the mealworms. A pair of Northern Mockingbirds built a nest early on in the season but never successfully raised chicks, and we thought they'd given up their breeding attempt for the season. A few weeks later, we heard their noisy chicks begging from the top of the tall conifers directly behind the church—they'd hidden their nest so well we didn't even see it until their young were almost ready to leave the nest.

In all, the natural areas behind All Saints Church were utilized by a number of birds this season. The tall grasses and wooded area provided refuge, food and suitable habitat for many beautiful (and locally uncommon) species.

All Saints Church Summary		
Nest Boxes Used: 10 of 10		
Species	Number of attempts	Nest Type

American Robin	1	Open Cup
Eastern Bluebird	3	Nest Box
Gray Catbird	1	Open Cup
House Sparrow	10	Nest Box
Mourning Dove	2	Open Cup
Northern Mockingbird	2	Open Cup
Tree Swallow	5	Nest Box
Total	24	



Eastern Bluebird eggs inside a nest box. Bluebird eggs are a beautiful pale blue color.

Lansing Center Trail

Lansing Center Trail's extensive grassy habitat skirted by wooded areas provided perfect habitat for many bird species this season. There were a number of Song Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow Warbler pairs that we observed bringing food to a nest but were too well hidden in the grass or shrubbery to find; Lansing Center Trail was home to many more nests than we were able to monitor.

This site was one of our more active sites for Eastern Bluebirds, which successfully raised a total of 6 chicks this season. The bluebirds were incorporated into our supplemental feeding experiment, so pairs with chicks enjoyed a heaping helping of mealworms each day once their eggs hatched. The bluebirds at this site did fairly well, despite the cold and had fewer issues with House Sparrows here than at our other sites. We've had issues with House Sparrows

outcompeting native species for nest box locations this year, but as Lansing Center Trail is fairly undeveloped on the north end, we only had House Sparrows near the road and housing developments at this site.

Overall, Lansing Center Trail provides a large expanse of natural area that both the community and wildlife utilized this summer. This area provided critical breeding habitat for a number of bird species, especially Eastern Bluebirds.

Lansing Center Trail Summary		
Nest Boxes Used: 21 of 22		
Species	Number of attempts	Nest Type
American Robin	2	Open Cup
Black-capped Chickadee	3	Nest Box
Cedar Waxwing	4	Open Cup
Common Yellowthroat	1	Open Cup
Eastern Bluebird	4	Nest Box
House Sparrow	11	Nest Box
House Wren	4	Nest Box
Mourning Dove	1	Open Cup
Northern Cardinal	2	Open Cup
Red-eyed Vireo	1	Open Cup
Song Sparrow	1	Open Cup
Tree Swallow	17	Nest Box
White-breasted Nuthatch	1	Natural Cavity
Total	52	



A Song Sparrow nest with 5 eggs hidden in the grass. These nests were difficult to find in the tall grasses at Lansing Center Trail.

Myers Hill

Myers Hill, though a smaller plot, hosted a variety of breeding bird species this summer. In addition to the species featured in the table of monitored nests, Myers Hill also hosted breeding Orchard Orioles, Baltimore Orioles, Chipping Sparrows and American Robins. The Osprey platform was active all season as well, and cars often stopped along the side of the road to view the nesting raptors. Tree Swallows did fairly well at this site and raised 8 chicks this year. While bluebirds did not nest at this location, a male bluebird hung around the boxes for a few weeks mid-season, indicating that bluebirds may choose to nest in the Myers Hill boxes in the future (as they have in the past). House Wrens did not complete any nests at this site during our field season, though they did build “dummy nests” in some of the boxes. Dummy nests are piles of sticks in boxes that the birds didn’t ultimately lay eggs in. It is thought that wrens build dummy nests to offer females a number of choices as to where they may breed, confuse nest predators, or prevent competitors from building nests in favorable locations.

In conclusion, Myers Hill provided breeding habitat for a wide variety of species. All boxes were used at this site, some multiple times by more than one species.

Myers Hill Summary		
Nest Boxes Used: 7 of 7		
Species	Number of attempts	Nest Type
Black-capped Chickadee	1	Nest Box

House Sparrow	4	Nest Box
House Wren	0 (dummy nests only)	Nest Box
Tree Swallow	3	Nest Box
Total	8	



A clutch of Black-capped Chickadees being weighed. We weighed chickadee and bluebird chicks to measure growth rates for our supplemental feeding experiment.

Salt Point

Salt Point was our most productive location for breeding birds that did not use nest boxes. While many species like Tree Swallows, Chickadees, House Wrens and House Sparrows did utilize the boxes, we also found countless naturally occurring open-cup nests on the property. This was our favorite site to search for nests this year, as the bushes and trees were absolutely saturated with breeding birds.

Salt Point was a productive site for nesting migrants. Yellow Warblers especially loved nesting in the honeysuckle bushes around the trails. While we managed to find and monitor 9 warbler nests, we spotted many more warblers feeding fledglings than those whose nests we found. Salt Point was the only site where we found Willow Flycatchers breeding. Their nests, soft and made of white cottonwood fluff, were a real treat to find. This was also the only site where we found breeding Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Gnatcatchers often build their lichen-sided cup nests out of view high in a tree, so we were ecstatic when we were able to watch the young fledge successfully from their nest at Salt Point. Cedar Waxwings occupied nearly every grape

vine cluster on the property, and both Baltimore and Orchard orioles nested in the tall trees along the trails. A Killdeer nested and raised young on the shore facing Myers Point, though we were unable to find the nest before the chicks hatched and fledged.

Myers Point was a very successful breeding location for many birds this year, and we look forward to finding more nests there during the 2018 breeding season.

Salt Point Summary		
Nest Boxes Used: 10 of 10		
Species	Number of attempts	Nest Type
American Robin	3	Open Cup
Baltimore Oriole	5	Open Cup
Black-capped Chickadee	1	Nest Box
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1	Open Cup
Cedar Waxwing	8	Open Cup
Chipping Sparrow	1	Open Cup
Eastern Bluebird	2	Nest Box
Eastern Kingbird*	1	Open Cup
Gray Catbird	4	Open Cup
Hooded Merganser	1	Nest Box
House Sparrow	8	Nest Box
House Wren	2	Nest Box
Northern Mockingbird	2	Open Cup
Red-winged Blackbird*	1	Open Cup
Song Sparrow	2	Open Cup
Tree Swallow	5	Nest Box
Willow Flycatcher*	2	Open Cup
Yellow Warbler	9	Open Cup
Total	57	

*This species has a decreasing population trend according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



A Yellow Warbler nest with a Brown-headed Cowbird egg (large and speckled) and a Yellow Warbler egg (small and white with brown spots at bottom only). To defend their nests from parasitic cowbird eggs, Yellow Warblers will often build over cowbird eggs and re-lay their own eggs. Many nests at Salt Point were multiple layers thick.



Hooded Mergansers cruise around Salt Point and Myers Point. Both merganser duck boxes at Salt Point were used this year, although not monitored routinely. Photo by Jay McGowan.