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Got Nest Boxes?!

Monitoring helps the Cornell Lab of Ornithology study climate change and nesting birds

Ithaca, NY—Anyone with one or more nest boxes can help scientists learn more about bird families and how they might be affected by climate change. Just **register the nest box** (or boxes) with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's **NestWatch** program at www.nestwatch.org. It doesn't cost anything but yields valuable information needed to better understand breeding birds and how their natural rhythms may be changing. Many species that build nests in cavities have become very accustomed to using wooden boxes set up by bird watchers to help the birds more easily find a home.

"It's time to lose the winter blues and focus on spring renewal," says project leader Tina Phillips. "NestWatch is easy and fun for adults and children. It helps all of us reconnect with nature which is good for our own health and well-being. NestWatch is a great activity to do on your own, in a classroom, or as a homeschool project. And it helps the birds too."

Studies have shown that some birds are laying their eggs sooner than in the past—as much as nine days earlier in the case of Tree Swallows—and that could spell trouble if the eggs hatch before a steady supply of insects is available for feeding the young. NestWatch participants visit nests once or twice per week and report what they see during each visit such as which kinds of birds are using their nest boxes, when the first eggs are laid, and the total number of eggs and young. The project collects this information for all species of nesting birds in North America.

"Citizen scientists really make a big difference" says Phillips. "You can turn a nest-box hobby or a passion for bird watching into reliable data, that when combined with other observations from across the continent, increases our understanding of the impacts of environmental change and human land-use on breeding birds. These data allow us to detect trends on large scales, which are very powerful for diagnosing potential threats to breeding birds. Armed with that knowledge, we can take the steps needed to help them survive in this changing world."

All NestWatch materials and instructions are available at www.nestwatch.org, including directions on how to monitor nest boxes without disturbing the birds. Anyone interested in putting up nest boxes for the first time will find information on how to provide the best and safest boxes for bluebirds, swallows, chickadees, and other cavity-nesting birds online. NestWatch participants also monitor the nests of backyard birds that don't use nest boxes, such as phoebes, robins, and goldfinches.

The hugely popular **NestCams** are back in action—anyone can get a live peek into nests and nest boxes across the country. Live cameras are focused on Eastern Bluebirds, Barred Owls, Wood Ducks, Barn Owls and more. Keep watching at www.nestcams.org and see what hatches!

NestWatch is a free nest-monitoring project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with the [Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center](http://www.si.edu/migratorybirdcenter), and funded by the [National Science Foundation](http://www.nsf.gov).

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Note: Watch the “Early Birds and Spring” video about the NestWatch project posted on the ScienCentral web site: <http://www.sciencentral.com/video/2009/03/19/early-birds-springtime/>.