

Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow Questionnaire

1. Describe Eastern Bluebird natural nesting habitat:
2. Describe Tree Swallow natural nesting habitat:
3. True or False: Before humans came to North America Eastern Bluebirds were very abundant, “as abundant as robins”.
4. Before humans came to North America where would Eastern Bluebirds most likely have lived – in what specific type of habitat?
5. Which of these is true? Eastern Bluebirds are officially classified as:
 - An Endangered Species
 - A Threatened Species
 - An Imperiled Species
 - They have never been classified Endangered, Threatened or Imperiled
6. What is the most recent (2012) population estimate for Eastern Bluebirds, according to Partners In Flight’s authoritative Species Database?
 - About 220,000
 - About 2,200,000
 - About 22,000,000
 - About 220,000,000
7. According to Partners In Flight the Tree Swallow population is estimated to be
 - About 170,000
 - About 1,700,000
 - About 17,000,000
 - About 170,000,000
8. Which is true?
 - Eastern Bluebirds weigh more than Tree Swallows
 - Tree Swallows weigh more than Eastern Bluebirds
 - Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows weigh about the same
9. True or False: Eastern Bluebirds seldom defeat Tree Swallows in one on one fights.
10. Which is predicted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)?
 - Future prospects for Eastern Bluebirds are worse than those for Tree Swallows
 - Future prospects for Tree Swallows are worse than those for Eastern Bluebirds
11. True or False: Eastern Bluebirds are gentle but Tree Swallows are aggressive

12. There are more than 60 species of cavity-nesting land birds in the U.S. and Canada. Of these how high do Eastern Bluebirds rank in total population?
3rd 13th 23rd 33rd 43rd 53rd
13. True or False: One way to reduce competition between Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows for boxes is to pair two boxes 5-10 feet apart, (or place two boxes on one pole), and then space each box pair at least 300 feet from other boxes.
14. Which is true on a continental level?
The Eastern Bluebird population is rising, but that of Tree Swallows is falling
The Tree Swallow population is rising, but that of Eastern Bluebirds is falling
15. Which is true?
Some box designs will keep Tree Swallows out of Eastern Bluebird boxes
Some box designs will keep Eastern Bluebirds out of Tree Swallow boxes
16. Which is true?
Some box designs will keep House Sparrows out of Eastern Bluebird boxes
Some box designs will keep House Sparrows out of Tree Swallow boxes
17. True or False: House Sparrows won't nest in boxes with small interiors
18. True or False: Slotted box openings deter House Sparrows
19. True or False: Adding more boxes in an area is the best solution for reducing competition for boxes between Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows
20. Which of these is more apt to be true?
If all people left North America Eastern Bluebird numbers would rise above current levels
If all people left North America Tree Swallow numbers would rise above current levels
21. True or False: It is legal to remove Tree Swallow nests from boxes so Bluebirds can use them.
22. True or False: It is legal to remove House Sparrow nests from boxes so Bluebirds can use them.

Resources

International Union for Conservation of nature (IUCN): www.icun.org
 Partners In Flight: www.partnersinflight.org
 Birds of North America Online: bna.birds.cornell.edu
 The Bluebird: www.nabluebirdsociety.org/Publications
 Tree Swallow Projects: www.treeswallowprojects.com

Answers

1. Eastern Bluebirds prefer open and semi-open areas with short, grassy/herbaceous vegetation, plus scattered perches and some trees containing cavities suitable for nesting.
2. Tree Swallows prefer open areas, especially near or over buggy wetlands, where there are snags or standing dead trees containing cavities suitable for nesting.
3. False: Before humans came to North America there was *far less* habitat suitable for Eastern Bluebirds than there is today. Remember that as recently as 200 years ago most of the continent east of the Great Plains was heavily forested. The idea that bluebirds were ever remotely as abundant as robins, even regionally, is ridiculous. There was never enough suitable habitat.
4. Eastern Bluebirds would have been most apt to be found were forest fires had created temporary areas of short vegetation interspersed with standing dead trees. Grazing by large Pleistocene mammals might have had the same effect, but bluebirds were most likely adapted to use burned-over areas in the early stages of forest regeneration.
5. Contrary to popular belief none of the three bluebird species has ever been officially classified as endangered, threatened or imperiled.
6. In 2012 Partners in Flight stated the Eastern Bluebird population was approximately 22,000,000 individuals.
7. In 2012 Partners in Flight stated the Tree Swallow population was approximately 17,000,000 individuals. In other words there are 5,000,000 more Eastern Bluebirds than there are Tree Swallows.
8. Eastern Bluebirds (30g) significantly outweigh Tree Swallows (20g).
9. False: A single Eastern Bluebird is normally more than a match for a single Tree Swallow. But if boxes meant for bluebirds are spaced too closely together, groups of swallows may be attracted, and groups of swallows may drive isolated bluebirds away.
10. The IUCN uses a numerical scoring system to estimate how vulnerable a bird species may be to potential stresses. Eastern Bluebirds received a 7 score while Tree Swallows scored an 8, where species with lower scores were judged more secure.
11. False: Both species can be very aggressive when competing for nest sites. They may fight fiercely both with their own and other species for the chance to reproduce. Although bluebirds are often described as gentle by humans, they most certainly are not.
12. Contrary to popular conception Eastern Bluebird numbers are very strong. Of the 60-plus species of native cavity-nesting birds in North America they rank 3rd in numbers. Only House Wren and Black-capped Chickadee populations are higher.

13. True: While it is not perfect, box pairing works often enough to be a preferred method for reducing nest site competition between Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

14. At the continental level the Eastern Bluebird population is rising steadily, while the Tree Swallow population, like that of many other aerial insectivores, is in decline.

15. Because they are so much smaller Tree Swallows can enter any box Eastern Bluebirds can. On the other hand, Tree Swallows can squeeze into many boxes whose entrances are too small for bluebirds.

16. House Sparrows are smaller than Eastern Bluebirds and will use any box bluebirds can use. House Sparrows also appear to be able to enter any box a Tree Swallow can, although some individual sparrows in some populations may be too large.

17. False: House Sparrows will use boxes with small interiors.

18. False: House Sparrows are not deterred by slotted entrances.

19. False: The best method for reducing competition between Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows is to pair boxes on poles set 5-10 feet apart, or even back-to-back on the same pole, and then keeping each pair of boxes at least 300 feet away from any other boxes.

20. If all people left North America huge areas would return to forest, greatly reducing Eastern Bluebird habitat, causing bluebird numbers to fall dramatically to a "normal" level. And as forests returned and wetlands and coastal areas reverted to their original character Tree Swallows should have more sites in which to nest plus larger and higher quality migration and wintering habitat. Swallow numbers would be expected to rise.

21. False: Tree Swallows are native songbirds. It is illegal under federal and state law to tamper with or remove their nests from a box, even from boxes intended for bluebirds.

22. True: House Sparrows are not native to North America. They are an alien invasive species. It is legal to remove their nests, and House Sparrows themselves can be trapped and killed.