

Comstock Communicator Article
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Comstock STEM Academy 5th Graders are Citizen Scientists

As their capstone project, 5th graders at STEM learned the science protocols for participating in Cornell University's Nest Watch 2014. The Nest Watch program seeks to identify nests of birds and monitor them to quantify the number of nests that succeed in a given year.

In support of student participation, Ms. Cara Kreig of Michigan State University worked closely with Mrs. Grintals to train students on safely finding and monitoring nests. Since, students don't want to be the cause of a nest failure. In addition, MSU donated ten nest boxes to be placed along the perimeter of the playground. These nest boxes are especially suited to House Wren's and Black-capped Chickadees, though an occasional flying squirrel has been known to take up residence. With the help of 5th grader Megan James and her father, Jason, STEM's nest boxes were installed well in advance of the Wren population's return.

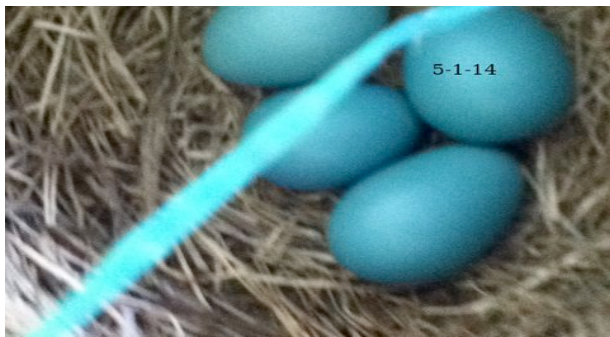


Anticipating arriving migratory birds, bird researchers all over the United States use Nest Watch data to track their progress. Ms. Kreig's blog (<http://birds-in-boxes.blogspot.com/>) indicated her first sighting of a banded Wren on April 26th. She explained, "The first males to come back have their pick of territories and they often spend a couple days wandering around before they settle down." Here at STEM Academy, we were completing our nest box site descriptions when we discovered nest box 4 has already been selected by a pair of Chickadees. Not only that, the female has already begun to line the nest with downy-soft materials. According to the Nest Watch Training Manual and Ms. Kreig's lesson, this is a clear sign that egg laying is about to begin. Students were very excited, so we quickly recorded the latitude and longitude and prepared to depart. A silence fell over the group and I knew something was up, Maya pointed and gasped, "Mrs. G. its right behind your head!" Sure enough. Sitting on a branch above my head, less than 4 feet away, sat one of the pair. He appeared to be curious about what we were doing with his home. We departed quickly, leaving them to their task.

As of May 7th, our Chickadees laid 7 eggs and will soon begin incubating them. Students will continue monitoring nests through the end of the year and hold an open house on the afternoon of June 10th to display their reports.

This is a citizen science project, so anyone interested should check out the Nestwatch.org website. All you need to do is complete the online training, pass the Certification Test, download a record form and start searching.

Interested individuals are welcome to contact Mrs. Grintals at STEM by calling 269 250-8581 and leaving a message.



The Bird Stalkers (Evan Caswell, Carter Wintz, and Allie Rawlinson) took this photo of an American Robin's clutch. Since there are 4 eggs, the female will start incubating the eggs soon.