

A Good Year for Bluebirds? A Look Back at 2016 Data

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Nestbox monitors usually want to know, “Was it a good year for bluebirds?” Answering questions like this would not be possible without the power of citizen science. Thanks to thousands of NestWatchers throughout the year, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s NestWatch project (www.NestWatch.org) was able to use more than 8,000 nest records to compare estimates of nest success for all three species of bluebird across their range.

In the regional summaries that follow, “nest success” is defined as the proportion of nests that fledged at least one young. Spoiler alert: The 2016 nesting season was above average for bluebirds in all regions, with the exception of Western Bluebirds in the Northwest.

REGIONAL ESTIMATES OF NEST SUCCESS:

Eastern Bluebird

Eastern Bluebirds enjoyed the highest percentage of successful nests in the Central Region (Figure 1, in blue). The Southeastern/Gulf Coast region (yellow) had a fairly high success rate of 79.8%, followed by the Northeastern region (green) at 75.1%.

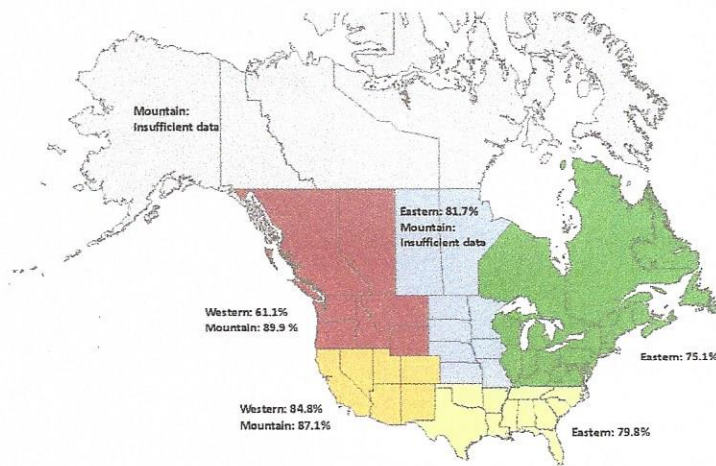


Figure 1. Estimates of nesting success for Eastern, Western, and Mountain Bluebirds by region. Nesting success is defined as the proportion of nests that fledged at least one young.

Western Bluebird

Western Bluebirds in the Southwest region (orange) did very well (84.8%) compared to those in the Northwest (coral) at just 61.1%. The lower-than-average nesting success for the Northwest region could be due to low numbers of reports, but this region did have a very warm spring compared to historical averages. A few Western Bluebirds are reported nesting in Texas each year but not enough to generate an estimate of success.

Mountain Bluebird

Mountain Bluebirds in the Northwest fared very well, with 89.9% successful nests, and the Southwest was not far behind at 87.1%. There was insufficient data on this species from the Far North (gray) and the Central region to generate estimates for those areas.

For more details on the 2016 nesting season, including analyses of other species, be sure to check out the *NestWatch Digest: Nesting Season 2016* year-end report (<http://nestwatch.org/explore-data/>).

Now let’s look at how many nests were reported to NestWatch in total (Figure 2). Eastern Bluebird

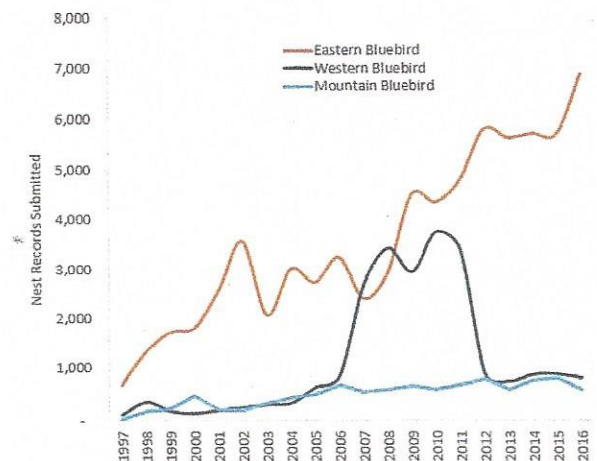


Figure 2. A look at 20-year trends in bluebird nest records submitted to NestWatch, a citizen-science nest monitoring program of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Want to participate in NestWatch this year? Download our new NestWatch mobile app (see ad in this issue of Bluebird) and start entering data right from the nestbox! We need individual nest attempts (as opposed to trail summaries) to create the regional estimates you see here, so please check each box, and tell us what you found!