

# San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary Nestbox Program

*By*

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## **History**

The nestbox program started as a mere handful of boxes at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in the late 90's. It was established as a joint program between Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) and Sea and Sage Audubon. IRWD installed the boxes as part of a mitigation requirement for their water reclamation plant. Sea and Sage Audubon provides the expertise of several volunteers to monitor and maintain the boxes. Monitoring of the boxes began in the year 2000. The program has steadily increased in size and now includes a total of 112 boxes located throughout the wildlife sanctuary.

## **Monitoring**

Volunteers monitor the boxes on a weekly basis during the breeding season (March through July). They count the number of nests, eggs, chicks, and number of chicks that fledge (successfully leave the nest). They also ensure that boxes are in workable condition, trim vegetation from around the boxes, protect the birds from ants, mites, and other predators, and record banding information.

## **Banding Program**

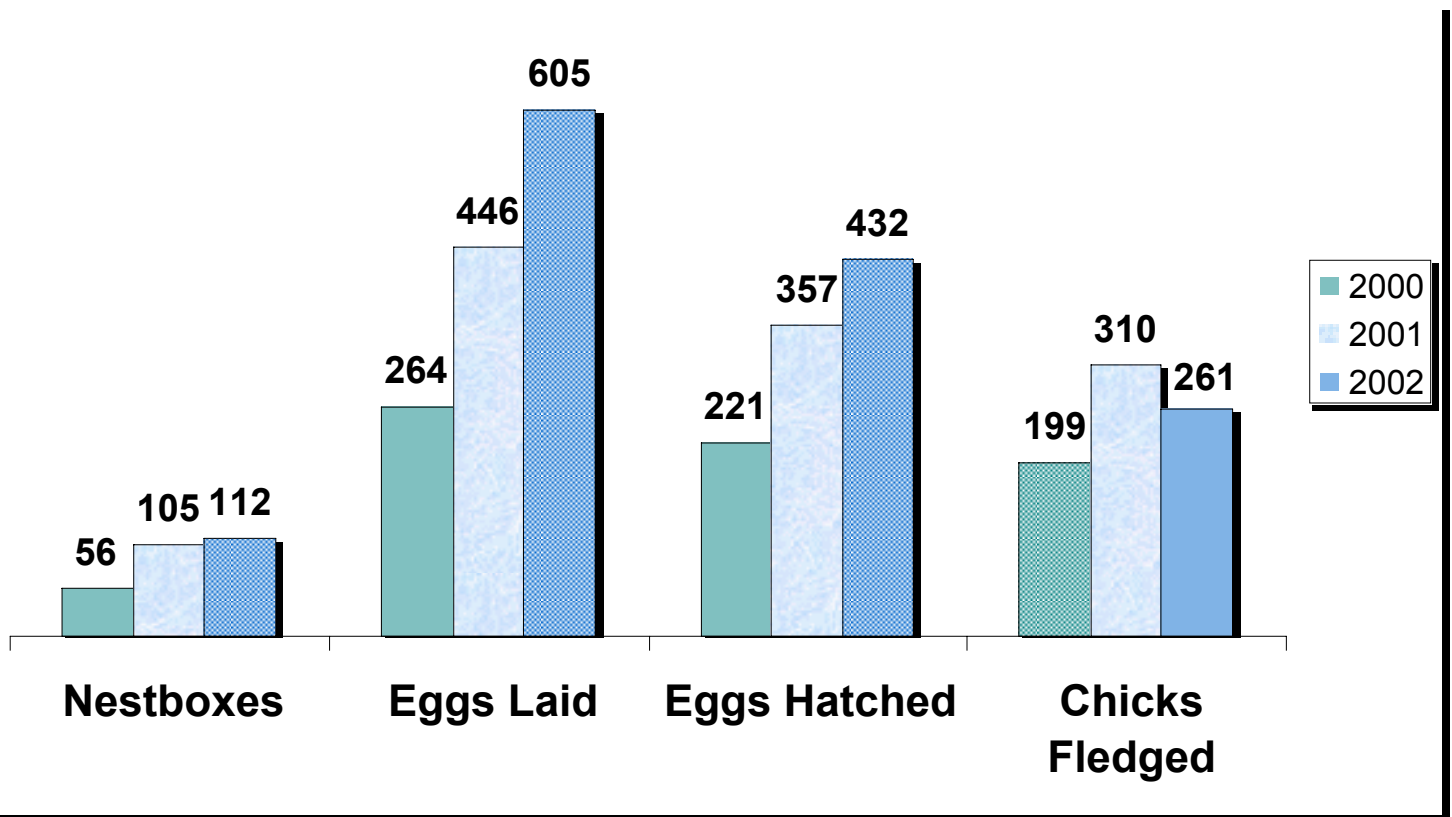
All tree swallow chicks are banded as part of the Tree Swallow Nesting Program, a Ventura-based non-profit organization. Chicks are banded at 10 days of age and fledge between 21 and 28 days of age. A small metal band is placed around one leg of each bird by a certified bander. Each band is engraved with a unique series of numbers, typically 4 numbers in the top row and 5 numbers in the bottom row. The band numbers, age of bird when banded, and banding location are reported to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), who then inputs the information into a nationwide database for banded birds. Valuable information can be collected when birds are found or recaptured later in life. If you ever find a banded bird, record the band sequence from top to bottom and from left to right.

Note the leg the band is on, whether it's the bird's left or right leg. Some birds can be color banded with one color band, or several, or a combination of color and metal. Again, note the leg it occurs on and the sequence of the color bands from closest to the body to furthest from the body (for example, blue over red or metal over yellow). Don't forget to note the type of bird if you are able to identify it or at least a description of the bird and it's size. This information can be called into the USGS Bird Banding Hotline at 1-800-327-BAND. You will receive an official certificate in the mail describing where and when the bird was banded and you'll be providing invaluable data for that bird species.

### **2000-2002 Nestbox Results**

Although the nestboxes are appropriately sized for a number of cavity nesting bird species, the boxes are used almost exclusively by tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*). The program has been highly successful in bringing the tree swallow back to the County of Orange as a breeding bird species. According to the *Atlas of Breeding Birds, Orange County, California* (Gallagher, 1997), no successful tree swallow nesting was confirmed during atlas years (1985-1990). Tree swallows typically nest in tree cavities as indicated by their name. However, this species was on the decline as a breeding species because of the loss of most old growth tree groves in southern California due to development. Luckily, tree swallows readily adapt to artificial nestboxes. The results of the three nesting seasons from years 2000 to 2002 are included in the chart below.

### **2000-2002 Nestbox Results**



Year 2002 marked the first year that a bird species other than a tree swallow attempted to nest. Two pairs of western bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) attempted nests in two separate boxes. Unfortunately, both bluebird nests failed. One pair of house wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*) nested and successfully fledged 5 young.

Several banded adults have been recaptured. To date, the oldest nesting bird that has been recaptured was 7 years old. Birds have been found nesting at just 1 year of age. Several birds were originally banded in Saticoy (Ventura County) and now nest on a yearly basis at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary, approximately 100 miles from where they were born. Some birds have been recaptured in the same box each time while others switch boxes between nesting seasons or even within the same season. Tree swallows in southern California are known to have two broods per year, unlike tree swallows on the east coast that are known to have only one brood per year.

Much more data will need to be collected before we can begin to understand the habits of tree swallows. If you are interested in helping out with the nestbox program, please contact Christine Tischer at [clmukai@netscape.net](mailto:clmukai@netscape.net). To learn more about the Tree Swallow Nesting Project log onto <http://www.treeswallows.org>.