



February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Mr. Andrew Bucking,  
Plant Manager, Uxbridge Pit,  
LafargeHolcim

Dear Mr. Bucking

The North Durham Nature Club has been managing a bird box program at the Lafarge gravel pit in Uxbridge for the past 7 years. This letter presents the annual report on our ongoing monitoring and cleaning completed in 2019. North Durham Nature is also seeking to re-establish a three-year agreement with Lafarge to continue our monitoring program into the future.

In 2013 we entered into a three-year contract with Lafarge to create and monitor approximately fifty bird boxes for cavity nesting birds in a gravel pit destined for reclamation. Habitat restoration began with tree planting the following summer while our boxes entertained their first feathered tenants of Tree swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, and Black capped Chickadees. In the first year of the program, the nest occupancy rate was 52% but it went up from there to 83% in 2019 (SEE TABLE 1). This last year we estimate that 29 bluebirds, 123 tree swallows and over 7 wrens were fledged. During the six years over 600 swallows, 150 bluebirds, 15 chickadees and 30 wrens have fledged. Finding an old tree with a suitable cavity to nest in is difficult for birds because of limited availability and as a result we can really help birds by providing an artificial tree cavity - the bird box. Weather, food shortage, and predation are some of the other challenges that birds' face. These factors will affect nest box occupancy and fledging success between years.

**TABLE 1 - BIRD OCCUPANCY IN NEST BOXES AT LAFARGE GRAVEL PIT**

YEAR	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
TREE SWALLOW	19	25	29	26	26	26	
EASTERN BLUEBIRD	5	7	9	9	9	8	
HOUSE WREN	0	2	0	0	3	6	
BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	1	0	1	1	0	0	
TOTAL BOXES OCCUPIED	25	34	39	36	38	40	
PERCENT OCCUPIED*	52	71	81	75	79	83	

\* note 100 % occupancy would mean that all boxes had nesting birds

### **Challenges ahead**

Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows are species that are adapted to open country habitat. Lafarge's restoration plan of tree planting to create a forest linking to the surrounding forests will eventually make the habitat unsuitable for these species. Our monitoring of the occupancy rates will assist in determining if these bird houses are no longer needed in the decades to come. We hope to continue monitoring the birds for Lafarge and would welcome more involvement with their future restoration plans of this land. One of our thoughts is that some portions of the pit be maintained as meadow habitat or at least not planted to trees, so that those declining bird species would be able to continue nesting here for a longer period. We would be able to provide guidance for identifying a suitable area and this could be incorporated into your long term restoration plan.

North Durham Nature is a not for profit group that depends on membership and donations. In 2013, Lafarge donated \$500 for our advice in set up, yearly monitoring of the birds' nest success and clean out of the boxes. Since then North Durham Nature has continued with regular monitoring, clean out of nest boxes (this is essential to ensure continued use and promote bird health by eliminating nest parasites, etc.) and a yearly report. Four times per year a team of four to six individuals work on this project at the site and further hours are spent inputting data and creating a report. An updated contract from Lafarge, accompanied by a donation in support of our efforts, would be a positive step forward for our continued involvement.

Sincerely,

Cara Gregory  
North Durham Nature – President