

Birds Are Us!

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"It was awesome to see all the cool nests and birds" was a response from one of the 63 fourth graders when we visited our school's "cavity nesting songbird trail". For the past two springs, the students enjoyed the opportunity to take their clip boards and data sheets and go around our school grounds and neighboring land to check what bird was nesting in the 8 boxes. Two years ago, Kent Hall had come to our school to help us select the sites and this spring he gave the students an orientation session prior to monitoring the boxes. He had also brought a nest display and explained how the different birds build their nests and what the eggs would look like. In 2009, we had bluebirds, tree swallows, and house wrens and this year, we also added the black capped chickadee.

The students became real scientists as they took their clipboards and data sheets and recorded what was nesting in each box, the # of eggs and were so excited when the eggs hatched, recorded the development of the chicks, and counted the days before they would fledge. A total of 5 teachers were also involved in the project and the classes were divided into smaller groups as they viewed the boxes and recorded their data. They



Photos by Sue Hall

liked to make predictions as what was in "box #3" so they would check their data sheets to see what it had the previous week and discuss what the contents would look like the next week. The students became very protective of the boxes and would inform other kids that they weren't supposed to look in them unless they were part of the 4th grade research team. One boy was very worried when a box had ants in it and remarked, "I hope you put ant killer in the box that was infested with ants, I don't want any of our birds to get hurt." As one girl put it, "It was so cool how some of the birds build nests with feathers, some

with sticks and some with pine needles. This whole thing was so much fun!" The students looked forward to Fridays because they knew that "Dr. Bluebird" as they came to call Kent Hall, would be coming. One of the boys wrote, "I want to be a 'Byologist' just like you". The feeling was mutual as "Dr. Bluebird" enjoyed the enthusiasm of the students and liked their attitude in doing the monitoring. This year, the 4th graders fledged 49 cavity nesting songbirds from their boxes and one student remarked on her note, "I hope you can come back next year so the 3rd graders get the same experience as I did".

