

BIRD NEST BOX PROGRAM



The City of Richmond Nest Box Program inventory consists of:

- 15 Barn Owl boxes
- 41 Tree Swallow boxes
- 30 Chickadee boxes
- 20 Purple Martin boxes

These birds typically nest in tree cavities, where they can incubate eggs and raise their chicks protected from the elements and predators. As suitable trees vanish, nesting boxes can substitute for a natural hole.

Data about nesting birds, gathered by trained volunteers, is uploaded to Project [Project NestWatch](#), a national database facilitated by [Bird Studies Canada](#). The data is used to follow the health of bird populations and the condition of their environment through long-term monitoring of nesting activity. Most of the nest boxes are monitored and maintained by volunteers.

Barn Owl Nest Box Program

Barn Owls readily move into appropriately designed nest boxes that are placed in or near habitats such as old agricultural fields and marshes. Since 2010, nest boxes have been placed in green spaces in Richmond. A few have been mounted on buildings, but most have been erected on five meter metal poles in the middle of fields in parkland. Nest boxes can be seen at the [Terra Nova Natural Area](#), [Terra Nova Rural Park](#), and [Garden City Lands](#). These boxes are monitored by a licensed [Canadian Wildlife Service](#) bird bander.

The Barn Owl Nest Box Program has been very successful. In 2021, 12 of 15 boxes were being used for nesting or roosting, and nine boxes contained breeding pairs. In a favorable season, these boxes can produce up to five to six young owls per box.

The long-term success of the Barn Owl Nest Box Program has inspired other municipalities to follow Richmond's lead and have started to install boxes in surrounding municipalities with similar success.

Additional resources are available at: [Terra Nova Barn Owl Nest Box Program](#).



Chickadee Nest Box Program

The Chickadee Nest Box Program began in 2014 with two nest boxes in [Richmond Nature Park](#). Both boxes were fitted with small internal cameras and the live footage was streamed into the Nature House for visitors to see. In 2019, 15 boxes were installed in [Paulik Neighbourhood Park](#) and another 15 boxes were installed in Terra Nova Rural Park and Terra Nova Natural Area. All boxes are monitored and maintained by volunteers.

Tree Swallow Nest Box Program

In 2021, local bird biologist Melissa Hafting suggested Tree Swallow nesting boxes be installed in Richmond Parks.

There are a total of 41 boxes on the Garden City Lands, [Garden City Park](#), Terra Nova Rural Park, and Terra Nova Natural Area. The original box design was modified in 2023 with white reflective heat shields to prevent the boxes from overheating during heat waves.

Each spring, Tree Swallows arrive in Greater Vancouver in late February or March. Male tree swallows usually arrive and defend a nest cavity up to several days prior to female arrival. Pairing begins as soon as females arrive on the breeding grounds. Pairs deposit a few pieces of nesting material in the nest cavity shortly after pair formation, but actual nest construction begins several weeks later and is completed almost entirely by females. Nests are constructed from grass and lined with feathers. Egg laying typically occurs throughout May and June.



Purple Martin Nest Box Program

In March 2023, 20 cedar nest boxes were installed near [Garry Point Park](#) to help the provincially blue-listed Purple Martin. Boxes were fitted with wire cages to protect against gulls, and baffles were installed onto the wooden pilings to prevent terrestrial predators from climbing the poles to get to the vulnerable chicks.

Purple Martins are colonial breeders and are the largest swallows in North America. They return to BC from Brazil in late April/early May and nest in southern BC. Their natural nesting tree cavities have been virtually eliminated and these species depend almost exclusively on human-made nest boxes to survive.

