Nantucket Barn Owl Nest Box Program

2026 Spring Survey Results

June 15, 2026

Dear Friends of Nantucket Barn Owls:

We are pleased to share the results of the Maria Mitchell Association's **2026 Spring Barn Owl Nest Box Survey**, conducted from **Sunday, May 10 through Wednesday, May 13**. This season, our team — Ginger Andrews, Elisa Kermani, Skyler Kardell, Cara Perry and Jónelle Gurley— inspected **64 nest boxes across Nantucket Island**.

We are especially delighted to have continued banding this year, made possible through the support of **Dr. Richard Veit**, who generously sub-permitted members of our team. Given our tight schedule, we had to make some real-time adjustments, so we appreciate your understanding if we were unable to connect with you during the survey.

Survey Summary and Findings

Of the 64 nest boxes, we checked:

- **37** showed signs of current or recent activity, including the presence of adults, eggs, young, nesting material, or fresh evidence of occupancy.
- **10 adult owls** were observed:
  - 2 adults flushed from nest box during the inspection
  - 4 incubating eggs
  - 1 adult that was then banded
  - 3 deceased owls
- **16 eggs** were documented, at varying stages of development including 2 infertile eggs.
- **11 young owls** were recorded:
  - 5 younger, recently hatched within the prior 3–5 weeks
  - 6 older, more developed chicks that were banded
- **7 owls in total** were successfully banded during the survey.

These findings reflect a productive start to the 2026 breeding season following a prolonged cold winter and delayed spring. Despite the challenges these conditions can pose for Barn Owls, occupancy and reproductive activity within the nest box network remained strong. The presence of active nests, incubating adults, eggs, and young owls suggests that sufficient prey resources were available to support breeding efforts.

Barn Owl reproductive success is closely tied to prey abundance, weather conditions, and habitat quality. The number of active boxes documented during this survey highlights the continued importance of Nantucket's nest box network as breeding habitat. The range of egg development stages and chick ages observed indicates that nesting occurred over an extended period, a common pattern that may reflect differences in territory quality, food availability, and breeding timing.

Overall, these observations demonstrate that Barn Owls are actively utilizing the nest box network and that nesting activity remains robust across the island. Continued monitoring will help assess nesting success, juvenile survival, and long-term population trends throughout the breeding season.

Supporting Barn Owl Success on Nantucket

Nest box hosts play a vital role in the success of Nantucket's barn owl population. You can support nesting owls by following a few simple stewardship practices:

Avoid Rodenticides: Please do not use rodent poisons on your property and encourage neighbors to do the same. If rodent management is necessary, we recommend fertility control products and other wildlife-safe approaches. Rodenticides can be fatal to barn owls and other predators that naturally help regulate rodent populations.

Reduce Disturbance: During the breeding season, avoid approaching or disturbing nest boxes. Activities such as mowing, trimming vegetation, or working directly beneath an occupied box can stress nesting adults and young.

Maintain Natural Cover: Leave a buffer of vegetation around the nest box whenever possible. Natural cover helps protect young owls and reduces predator activity near the nest.

Observe Responsibly: Enjoy watching barn owls from a distance, particularly around sunset when they are most active. Observing from at least 100 feet away helps minimize disturbance while allowing you to witness these remarkable birds in their natural environment.

Community Engagement and Looking Ahead

The Barn Owl Nest Box Program is made possible by a community that values conservation, research, and education. Through ongoing monitoring, outreach, and community science initiatives, we continue to connect residents, students, and visitors with Nantucket's wildlife while fostering the next generation of environmental stewards.

As the breeding season continues, we will track nesting activity, monitor long-term population trends, and share what we learn to support informed conservation efforts for barn owls and their habitats.

We are grateful to the staff, volunteers, landowners, and nest box hosts whose dedication makes this work possible, with special thanks to Ginger Andrews, Mitch Blake, Elisa Kermani, Skyler Kardell, and the many volunteers who contributed to this year's surveys.

We also honor the legacy of Dr. Robert Kennedy, whose vision for barn owl conservation on Nantucket continues to guide this program. Thank you for being part of this effort. Your support helps ensure that barn owls remain a thriving part of Nantucket's natural heritage for generations to come.

With immense gratitude,

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Maria Mitchell Association Barn Owl Nest Box Spring 2026 Findings

Nest box occupancy was observed across all regions of Nantucket, with the highest activity in the south and southeast and lower—but still widespread—occupancy in the eastern, northeastern, and western portions of the island.

Since the program began, the Barn Owl Nest Box Program has provided a unique window into the lives of Nantucket's barn owls. Each season adds to our understanding of how these birds use the island's habitats, respond to changing environmental conditions, and successfully raise their young.

This year's survey documented active nest boxes across all regions of the island. Overall occupancy varied by area, with the highest activity recorded in the south and southeast (11/17 boxes; 64.7%), followed by the eastern region (13/26; 50.0%) and the northeast (8/17; 47.1%). The lowest activity was observed in the western portion of the island (5/12; 41.7%). While these differences are modest, they suggest spatial variation in nest box use across the island.

Seasonal conditions, including a prolonged cold winter and delayed onset of spring, may have influenced early-season prey dynamics and habitat use, contributing to variation in nest box occupancy across the island. These patterns may also reflect differences in habitat structure, land use, and the distribution of suitable natural roosting and nesting sites. As with most raptor monitoring datasets, annual variation is expected and likely influenced by both ecological conditions and breeding timing.

By continually refining our monitoring and data collection efforts, we are building a long-term dataset that helps characterize the health and distribution of Nantucket's barn owl population. These findings contribute to broader scientific understanding of the species, inform local conservation actions, and demonstrate the value of sustained community-supported monitoring.

Barn Owl Survey - May 10 to May 13, 2026

Boxes Located in Town and West of Town

#	Box Owner – Location	Adults	# of Young	Eggs	Notes
104	Land Bank Long Pond – Madaket	1♀	6	0	More than 100 pellets around and in box, banded 4 chicks and adult female, 2 too young
49	Swift – Madaket	1♂	0	0	Cleaned; 1 deceased make found in box
34	McDonough – Madaket	0	0	0	Cleaned; No recent activity feathers and debris noted
35	Untereker – Madaket	0	0	1	Cleaned; 1 abandoned infertile egg, need baffles and tree and ivy pruning
77	Toth – Dionis	0	0	0	Cleaned; No recent activity
64	Keene/Moy – Dionis	0	0	0	Cleaned; No recent activity and area very disturbed
28	Crocker – Dionis	1♀	0	7	Active; 1 adult female incubating eggs
38	McKerrow – Town	0	0	0	Cleaned; fresh pellets in and out of box
82	Boszhardt – Town	0	0	0	Cleaned; old pellets in and out of box
67	Abbey – Town	1♀	2	2	1 banded adult female incubating eggs, banded 2 chicks and other 2, too young
100	Land Bank New Lane (Callahan) – Town	0	0	0	Cleaned; Minimal recent activity, crows present
98	Egan – Town	0	0	0	Inactive; propose re-site/re-locate

Boxes Located East of Town

#	Box Owner – Location	Adults	# of Young	Eggs	Notes
74E	Keneally – Quaise	0	0	0	Cleaned; old pellets present
75W	Keneally – Quaise	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets approx. 2 doz.
14	Thom – Polpis	0	0	0	No activity, propose re-site
7	Hanson - Polpis	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, needs baffles and box repairs
101	Kinsella – Polpis	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets < 1 doz.
96	Puljic – Polpis	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets
76	Littman – Polpis	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets > 1 doz.
52N	Falk – Polpis	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets
52S	Falk – Polpis	0	0	0	No debris; Pellets and Whitewash noted
44	Kellner – Quidnet	0	0	0	No debris but > 2 doz. Fresh pellets
4	Newhouse – Squam	0	0	0	No recent activity
5E	Blumenstein – Squam	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets (1 doz.) and whitewash
5W	Blumenstein – Squam	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets and whitewash
97	Stegman – Squam	-	-	-	Not checked
91	Roe-Mejer – Pocomo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity – need baffles & latch repair
79	Georgantas – Pocomo	-	-	-	Not checked
72	Miller – Polpis	0	0	0	No activity, propose re-site
80	Gandini/Booth – Medouie Creek	0	0	0	No recent activity
11	Medouie Creek Association	2♂, 1♀	0	6	1 banded dead male found near ox, I un-banded adult male and female present incubating 6 eggs, male flushed from box
39	Riley – Polpis	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets approx. ½ doz.
90	Cross – Polpis	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity – need baffles
47	Mulcahy – Quidnet	1♂, 1♀	3	0	1 adult female flushed from box, 1 banded adult male present, 3 chicks < few weeks old
30S	Juelson/Rubaltelli – Quidnet	0	0	0	No recent activity
41N	Gagne (Knauft) – Quidnet	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity
85	Esposito – Quidnet	0	0	0	No recent activity

Boxes Located Northeast of Town

#	Box Owner – Location	Adults	# of Young	Eggs	Notes
78	Parker – Monomoy	0	0	0	Cleaned; 5-6 old pellets, needs baffles and cut back tree
93	Ballinger – Monomoy	0	0	0	No debris noted; fresh and old pellets (approx. 50), need baffles
94	Orenstein – Monomoy	0	0	0	No debris noted; fresh and old pellets (approx. 50), prune cedar
66W	Armbrester – Monomoy	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets approx. 100
105	Patterson/Mullen – Monomoy	0	0	0	No debris; Pellets and Whitewash noted Need larger undisturbed area
107	McClintock – Monomoy	-	-	-	Not checked
92	Cohane/Meisenberg – Shawkemo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity, needs tree trim
102	Nigrelli – Shimmo	0	0	0	Inactive; propose re-site or increase no mow area signs of older activity
20SE	Rubenstein – Abram's Point	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity – need baffles and trim
21W	Rubenstein – Abram's Point	0	0	0	Cleaned; no recent activity – need BBR

95	Carney – Shawkemo	-	-	-	Not checked
61	Tratt – Shimmo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, fresh pellets approx. ½ doz.
57	Burke – Shimmo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Rec heavy prune on cedar, no mow
19P	Young – Shimmo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity, propose re-site + new
40N	Young – Shimmo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Squirrel activity (3), propose re-site
83	Anderson – Shimmo	0	0	0	Cleaned; Active, older pellets approx. ½ doz.
68	Zehner – Shimmo	0	0	0	Inactive; repaired back door

Boxes Located South and Southeast of Town

#	Box Owner – Location	Adults	# of Young	Eggs	Notes
81	Dutra – Hummock Pond	0	0	0	Cleaned; old pellets and fresh whitewash, no debris
2	Greenhill – Hoicks Hollow	0	0	0	Cleaned; recent activity, fresh and old pellets
71	Congleton – Tom Nevers	-	-	-	Not checked
62	Jeagar/O'Connell – Tom Nevers	-	-	-	Not checked
60	Learnard – Tom Nevers	0	0	0	Cleaned, squirrel activity – needs baffles
70	Bell – Tom Nevers	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets observed
63	Waterman – Madequecham	0	0	0	Cleaned; recent activity, fresh and old pellets
58E	Dickson – Madequecham	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets observed > ½ doz.
59W	Dickson – Madequecham	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets observed
89	Brescher – Cisco	0	0	0	Recent activity, fresh and old pellets approx. 2 doz. And feathers observed
73	Heyer – Miacomet	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets & whitewash observed
99	Gordon – Miacomet	0	0	0	Inactive; heavily disturbed area, possible re-site/vegetation change
106	Culp/Anderson – Miacomet	0	0	0	No debris; 1 doz. Fresh pellets observed
103	Herr – Surfside	-	-	-	Not checked
88N	Kennedy – Surfside	0	0	0	Cleaned; recent activity, fresh and old pellets approx. 2 doz. And feathers observed
88S	Kennedy – Surfside	1♂	0	0	Cleaned; active, fresh pellets > 50 1 deceased banded make found near box
84	Warner – Surfside	0	0	0	No debris, fresh pellets observed > 4 doz.

Summary Findings

Total Number of Nest Boxes Checked	64
Active (at least partial activity)	37
Boxes with Adults, Young and/or Eggs	8
Number of Young	11
Number of Adults	10
Number of Eggs	16
Number banded	7