An evaluation of the Brown-headed Nuthatch and Eastern Bluebird reintroduction program in southern Florida

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Reintroductions are a widely used conservation tool. However, few programs incorporate regular performance evaluations and published results remain scarce. Successful avian reintroductions have primarily been conducted with larger, long-lived species such as game birds and raptors. We present an evaluation for the reintroduction of two passerine species, the Brown-headed Nuthatch and Eastern Bluebird, to Everglades National Park, FL. Success of the reintroduction program was evaluated using two annual short-term criteria: 1) released individuals established territories and bred successfully and 2) population size increased in successive years, and one long-term criterion: 3) reproduction and survival estimates were similar between the reintroduced population and a high-quality reference population. In each year that translocations occurred (1997-2001), translocated individuals established territories and bred successfully and population size increased. At the end of the translocation phase in 2001, 13 nuthatch and 16 bluebird breeding territories were established Nuthatch population size increased in the two years post-translocation (2002-2003) to 19 territories, while bluebird population size increased in 2002, but decreased back to 16 territories in 2003. Nuthatch and bluebird productivity and adult survival were higher in the reintroduced population than the high quality reference site. According to our criteria, the reintroduction program has been successful. However, reintroduced populations are small and susceptible to environmental and demographic stochastic events. We recommend that monitoring be continued and that population viability analyses be conducted to assess the long-term sustainability of these populations.