

Bluebird Box Monitoring Effort 2011 Cove Point LNG, Calvert County, Maryland

In 2001 Arlene and Doug Ripley were monitoring Cove Point for TNC. Their suggestion of establishing a bluebird box trail was accepted and implemented with the assistance of the owners of Cove Point LNG.



The Ripleys continued this activity until they moved to Arizona in 2007. This marks the second year of monitoring conducted by Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust. Thanks to the assistance of environmental engineer Jim Levin and the security staff, weekly access to these boxes has been established throughout the nesting season.

The initial visit to the trail at Cove Point for 2011 was done on April 8. The location of the nest boxes is unchanged from 2010. Additional wear will require some minor roofing and replacement of bracing for the predator baffles. This work is scheduled for the fall.



This year's effort began earlier and with a clean slate of housing inventory that had already received its fall cleaning. Nesting activity was already evident in five boxes with two nests being complete. The bad news was once again a dead bird, this time a tree swallow in box 32. There was no evidence of any physical damage to the bird. Later conversations suggested perhaps the bird was able to enter the box but not leave it. Regardless of the cause no further nesting activity occurred in box 32.

Monitoring continued through June and into July. The two tree swallow nests of six birds each fledged within a week of each other. Lake Levy with its open fields on two sides is excellent foraging habitat for these insectivores. Box 25 which housed only stinging insects in 2010 finally had a nest and three eggs. They hatched and were doing fine until the last visit when two were gone but one remained. Whether the parents had abandoned the baby or they had met some mishap, this one did not make it. The bird had pin feathers on the wing and was probably a few days from fledging.

During the season there were twelve attempts at nesting by Eastern Bluebirds. All twelve broods successfully hatched with one casualty. A total of fifty-eight baby bluebirds were fledged. In addition two broods of six Tree Swallows also made it out of the box and into the air. On the last day of monitoring, August 15, all boxes were empty of birds. The remaining nests were removed and the season concluded.



Even with uninterrupted monitoring results were fairly close to those of 2010. There were not as many attempts at nesting, but all of those attempts were successful. The bluebird trail is still in good physical condition. The habitat remains suitable for successful breeding of the target species the Eastern Bluebird. Boxes located close to large water sources continue to attract Tree Swallows and will most likely continue to do so. Currently no boxes are located close enough to the woods to attract chickadees or titmouse to nest. In any case all of these species are native and no box should or will be moved because they produce these young.

Insect infestation was not an issue this year. Attempts by wasps to nest in the boxes were stopped before they got out of hand. Once again we had two birds' deaths but this year one was an adult and one a baby. Again predators did not seem to be the issue. My largest concern from both a personal and scientific outlook was predators. I can handle dealing with mammals and insects if need be, but I'd rather leave the reptiles alone. This summer has not had the number of copperhead reports as we did last year none-the-less the picture shows we do have snakes. This one I estimated at over six foot sunning in a blackberry bramble area near Lake Levy.



The weather this year was hotter than last and even with most monitoring done in the morning it was uncomfortably warm. The chigger and tick populations are doing well and this year there was an abundance of biting flies in July. I have added additional species to the bird list. This list is exclusive to the area where the boxes are found and the season in which they are monitored. A more complete list of avian species at Cove Point should be a focus of future work.



List of birds observed at Cove Point LNG in the vicinity of the bluebird trail.

Common Yellowthroat	Yellow Warbler	Lo. Waterthrush	Northern Parula	Wood Thrush
Chipping Sparrow	Field Sparrow	Northern Junco	White-th. Sparrow	Song Sparrow
Northern Cardinal	Eastern Towhee	Indigo Bunting	Blue Grosbeak	Am. Goldfinch
House Finch	Tree Swallow	Barn Swallow	Eastern Pewee	Acadian Flycatcher
Great-crested Fly.	Red-eyed Vireo	White-eyed Vireo	Blue Jay	American Crow
Fish Crow	Turkey Vulture	Black Vulture	Bald Eagle	Red-should. Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk	Osprey	Yellow-bill. Cuckoo	Scarlet Tanager	Summer Tanager
Orchard Oriole	Car. Chickadee	Carolina Wren	Tufted Titmouse	Downy Wdpecker.
Hairy Wdpecker.	Northern Flicker	Pileated Wdpecker	Red-bell. Wdpeck.	Mallard
Canada Goose	Great Blue Heron	Belted Kingfisher	Spotted Sandpiper	Herring Gull
Ring-billed Gull	Laughing Gull	Gray Catbird		

Submitted September 20, 2011

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Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust