

Bluebird Box Monitoring Effort 2017 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. In 2010 monitoring of these boxes was re-established by Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust. Thanks to the assistance of the security staff, weekly access to these boxes has been established throughout the nesting season.

The bluebird trail for 2017 at Cove Point began the year with twelve boxes and a thirteenth was added on May tenth. Two of these are within the industrial area. Box 35 is situated in the rip rap sized rocks near gate 6. Box 37 is located on the gravel parking area next to gate 8. The other ten boxes are located around lakes Levy and Osborne. The additional box was a replacement for box 32 which was used to replace box 22 last season. Box 22 was replaced as well after being damaged by a fallen tree.

After two down years for nesting it was with a mixture of trepidation and hope that the initial visit to the trail at Cove Point for 2017 was undertaken on April 7. Boxes were inspected for structural integrity and to see if the nesting season had begun. Box 22 was dangling from its post and had several Turkey Vultures loafing on or near it. The box had structural damage and was removed. This winter had seen an extraordinarily warm February, followed by a more normal colder and wetter March. Major construction efforts at the plant are winding down.



Box 22 location as a Turkey Vulture perch.



A new box at site 32.

The major problem this year was the recurring issue of nesting attempts by wasps. This was remedied in all but box 25 by applying Dove bar soap to the inside of the box. On another note concerning insects, this seems to be an up year for dragonflies. At least four species have been observed and dozens of the



golden-winged variety were in every grassy/weedy area.

There continues to be no evidence of house sparrows in any of the locations.

Nesting activity this year was slow to start with two bluebird nests started and a few weeks later some activity from tree swallows. Box 26 by Lake Levy has always been an active box for the swallows. This year a very minimal effort was put in and a much shorter nest was made. Four eggs were laid and incubated. On the May 30th visit the box had at least one baby and I did not disturb the nest further. My next visit was on June 9th after a vacation and the box no longer had any living young. Three developed babies were found and one egg remained. The cavity that held the young and egg had almost no nesting material under them. The normal nest was much larger and very fluffy with feathers (usually from the resident geese that live by the lake). There was no evidence of desiccation or any ant activity on the dead bodies. They were however slightly flattened. I speculate that they may have been crushed by the weight of the adult bird.



The first brood of the year was in box 29.

The used nest was removed. Note the dried excrement.

In 2016 in box 28 a tree swallow nest was built atop of an abandoned bluebird nest. In 2017 in box 27 this unusual action was taken by a bluebird in response to an abandoned chickadee or titmouse nest.



Box 27 atop a small hill.



These five eggs were laid in April. Note the blue on the fledgling's wing.





In late May this nest was built by either a chickadee or titmouse but not used.



In mid June a bluebird built a nest on top of it and started laying eggs

Tree swallows are very active around Lake Levy. There are usually several nesting attempts in box 26 and at least one attempt in other boxes near the lake. The number of eggs has been five or six. This year only two attempts happened with four eggs in each. Box 24 by Lake Osborne and box 28 off of Lake Levy were the two used.



Tree Swallow baby in box 28. Note the large lipped white mouth. This enlarged target makes it easier for the parent to feed the hungry chick.

Totals for the 2017 season were seven attempts by bluebirds to nest. All seven were successful with between three and five eggs. A total of thirty-two bluebirds were fledglings. Five boxes saw no nesting activity and only two had repeat attempts. Three attempts were made by tree swallows of which two succeeded with four birds each. The one chickadee/titmouse attempt failed.

Birds of Cove Point's Nesting Season (winter migrant*)

Chipping Sparrow	Field Sparrow	Song Sparrow	Northern Junco*
White-throated Sparrow*	Northern Cardinal	Eastern Towhee	Indigo Bunting
Blue Grosbeak	American Goldfinch	House Finch	Tree Swallow
Barn Swallow	Eastern Pewee	Great-crested Flycatcher	Acadian Flycatcher
Red-eyed Vireo	White-eyed Vireo	Yellow-throated Vireo	Blue Jay
Fish Crow	American Crow	Turkey Vulture	Black Vulture
Bald Eagle	Red-shouldered Hawk	Red-tailed Hawk	Osprey
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Scarlet Tanager	Summer Tanager	Orchard Oriole
Mallard	Canada Goose	Pied-billed Grebe*	Green-winged Teal*
Lesser Scaup*	Ring-billed Duck*	Great Blue Heron	Spotted Sandpiper
Herring Gull	Ring-billed Gull	Laughing Gull	Tufted Titmouse
Carolina Chickadee	Carolina Wren	Belted Kingfisher	Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker	Pileated Woodpecker	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Wild Turkey

Cove Point Species along the beach and marsh available in separate document.

Bob Boxwell, Executive Director
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Box Turtle



Mud Turtle