

## Bluebird Box Monitoring Effort 2016 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 summer.



Box 24 near Lake Osborne

The bluebird trail at Cove Point consists of thirteen boxes. 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. Box 36 was located by a block-lined "pool" which periodically holds water. This site was taken in the expansion project. The other eleven boxes are located around lakes Levy and Osborne.

The initial visit to the trail at Cove Point for 2016 was done on April 6. Boxes were inspected for structural integrity and to see if the nesting season had begun. The spring had been wet but not

particularly cold. Major construction efforts at the plant continue to make access more difficult and one of the two remaining boxes inside the fence (Box 37) again saw no activity this season.

There continues to be no evidence of house sparrows

This year four species utilized the boxes, Tree Swallow, Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Chickadees, and Tufted Titmouse.

The initial visit was not that promising with two partial Tree Swallow nests and one partial bluebird nest. This slow rough start continued through the entire season.

Boxes 25, 29, 31, and 37 had absolutely no activity the entire season. A dead Tree Swallow was found in box 25 on April 25. There was no evidence of predation. Box 30 had a partial chickadee nest that never was completed. Ants proved to be an issue here. Wasps were also a problem in several boxes.



Box 26 by Lake Levy once again hosted a family of tree swallows.



Goose feathers provide a fluffy bed for hatchling tree swallows.

The strange story of Box 28. This usually successful box is located in the grass about 100 yards away from Lake Levy. Only bluebirds have utilized this box in past years. This year May 25 had a nest with 5 eggs. By June 10 there were six eggs. On June 16 the nest had been covered by a partial tree swallow nest and it was full of ants. Upon examination a single bluebird egg had been punctured and this most likely attracted the ants. I emptied the entire box and removed all ants. Ten days later nesting activity had begun again and by June 3 a Titmouse nest with 5 eggs was observed. They had fledged by July 11.

Including last year's lackluster results this was without a doubt the worst nesting season on record for the Cove Point LNG nesting box trail. Early season issues with many locations were noted locally. The rain throughout the month of May had its toll everywhere. But most locations rebounded and reported a productive season.

None of the three species utilizing the trail at Cove Point came near their historic numbers. Unsuccessful attempts were at an all-time high as well. Last year this statement concluded our report, "It will be interesting to see what the 2016 season brings in the way of a comeback for our residential box nesters." I hope more of the same is not in store for 2017.

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

Chipping Sparrow	Field 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	Great Blue Heron	Spotted Sandpiper	Herring Gull
Ring-billed Gull	Laughing Gull	Tufted Titmouse	Carolina Chickadee
Carolina Wren	Belted Kingfisher	Downy Woodpecker	Northern Flicker
Hairy Woodpecker	Pileated Woodpecker	Red-bellied Woodpecker	

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

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