

Bluebird Box Monitoring Effort 2010 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 year the monitoring of these boxes has been re-established 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 summer.

The initial visit to the trail at Cove Point was done on April 29. Three boxes were found inside the gate, one by the lagoon, one by gate six, and the final uphill from the boardwalk gate. None of these are located in particularly attractive habit, but all had nesting activity over the season. Another eleven boxes were located around lakes Levy and Osborne. As with the other boxes these were all in good shape, the primary difference being the more natural location with lots of shrubs, water, and trees.



An impressive element of this effort was the lack of house sparrows and the issues they present. We did find on two occasions a dead adult bird in the box, but there was no evidence of house sparrows

nesting or even their presence (see bird list). The condition of the boxes, their poles, and predator guards was very good. No repair work was needed.

An inventory of the first day showed three boxes with nests, ants, and wasp, three with nest but no eggs, two with old nest with no pests, two with four eggs, three with bluebird babies in the nest, and one with five eggs. The old nests and those with pests were removed and cleaned out with a scraper and paint brush. A map was drawn and has been transcribed using the ADC Calvert County map book.

A follow up visit on May 6 showed new nesting activity around the lakes, but also a dead adult female found in box 31. There was no apparent cause of death. Both bird and nest were removed. Box 23 which had the five eggs had hatched out and the young were noisy. Nesting activity in box 30 (Peterson model) turned out to be tree swallows rather than bluebirds. Other species which use bluebird boxes include house wren (not common), tufted titmouse, and Carolina chickadee. None of the boxes are close enough to the woods to attract the two later species.

Due to staff vacation the next visit was not until June 4. From this point monitoring was done on a weekly basis. Over the two and a half months of monitoring the early burst of action inside the fenced area slowed. Each box initially had nests and two fledged broods. One of the boxes also fledged a second brood. Action around the lake moved around, but there were always active nests with birds and eggs throughout the season. Seven of the boxes saw at least one successful brood. Another three had nests and eggs, but produced no young. And one box 25 had no activity (except wasp) throughout the year.



During the season there were eighteen attempts at nesting by Eastern Bluebirds. Of these eleven broods successfully hatched. A total of sixty-one babies were fledged. In addition one brood of five Tree Swallows also made it out of the box and into the air. On the last day of monitoring, August 27, all boxes were empty of birds. The remaining nests were removed and the season concluded.



With an earlier start and an uninterrupted early monitoring schedule, results will be more revealing in years to come. At the moment the trail is in good physical condition. The habitat is still suitable for successful breeding of the target species the Eastern Bluebird. Boxes located close to large water sources have attracted 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 the biggest issue with no evidence of any predation. The two dead adults are a cause for some concern, but after all boxes had been cleaned this problem did not resurface. 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 had a number of copperhead reports and I stepped in the high grass with caution.

I should have been more concerned with ticks and chiggers. Both thrived in the hot summer heat. By August things had cooled a bit and the main action was the plopping of turtles into the lakes as



I approached. Deer were frequently seen during the monitoring with the very occasional rabbit or fox sighting. Most monitoring was done during the earlier afternoon. During the period of monitoring a mental list of birds seen and heard was kept. I've added it below in the appendices with the map.

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	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		