

## Bluebird Box Monitoring Effort 2012 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.



The initial visit to the trail at Cove Point for 2012 was done on April 9. Boxes 35, 36, and 37 are 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.

Spring was roofing season for the boxes. Every box was inspected for roof integrity and two complete tops were replaced. Most roofs now have a standard roof shingle as well. Insect nesting primarily of the stinging type was minimal, but there were more spider nests.

An impressive element of this effort has been the lack of house sparrows and the issues they present. There has been absolutely no evidence of house sparrows in the nesting area. Once again though, I found a dead adult bird in box 32. There was no real evidence of how the Tree Swallow died. Since it was inside the box was it hurt outside the box and sought refuge? Or did it damage itself flying into the box? This is the second year I have found a



dead adult bird in this box. In addition there has been no successful nesting here in three years. Perhaps it is time to move this box.

Our first visit immediately tallied the three species using the boxes this year. Carolina Chickadee was the new addition along with last year's residents, Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird. We had six boxes with bluebird nests; four with eggs and two without. Four other boxes also had active nests (see species account below).



By April 25<sup>th</sup> we had three broods hatched and eggs in another box.

May 2<sup>nd</sup> the last of the four original

clutches of eggs had hatched. May 9<sup>th</sup> saw the three early nests out and flying. Meanwhile one more brood had hatched and other set of eggs was laid. Two more broods fledged by May 16<sup>th</sup>.



May 23<sup>rd</sup> was full of surprises. The shocker was activity in box 25. The only nest this box has ever supported had been wasp. For the first time the box had a bluebird nest! By the 30<sup>th</sup> there were five eggs which hatched June 13<sup>th</sup>. Another surprise was nest 35. There had been a fair amount of human activity near the box which is located on a pullout along the pipeline. This year maintenance work has been ongoing along this stretch. At times equipment is staged from the pullout. I expected this might be an issue so I was pleased to find a new nest and four eggs (later one more was added). By the end of June these guys had flown the coop! The final piece for this fine May day was over at the lagoon. Our late clutch in box 36 had finally hatched and within three weeks five bluebirds had fledged. It seemed to take forever for this batch to be laid and in no time they were gone. Since the nest was fairly clean I didn't remove it immediately. The next week two eggs had been laid and the week after five were in place. Maybe mamma has figured this thing out.

June also saw second broods in several more boxes. Box 24 and 29 had eggs in them on the 9<sup>th</sup> and box 28 joined on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Boxes 22, 31, and 32 showed no nesting activity. Box 22 started the season with a downed tree within inches of the box. Even after removal a month later, no bird has moved in and started nesting.

This year we had our first broods of chickadees. I have some familiarity with this species having banded them in the past. In 2011 I also witnessed them nesting in a bluebird box at Appeal Elementary School in Lusby. The use of moss in their nest construction is a good clue as to whom the builder was. Another great clue is the agitated parent scolding you outside the box while you investigate their home. Our first visit had a nest and very upset bird at box 37 outside Gate 6. The Peterson



box (30) also had a nest and aggrieved parent, but this one had 6 eggs. By April 25<sup>th</sup> mom finally let me look at the first nest and find 6 eggs. Meanwhile the same date the Peterson box had babies. A week later the other box had its brood out of the egg and by May 9<sup>th</sup> the first brood was fledged. Box 37 fledged its young by May 23<sup>rd</sup>. After that date neither box saw any activity.

Tree Swallows are the other species that found the boxes on this trail attractive. The combination of open areas near a pond is ideal and the boxes have been used every year. If moss is the mark for a chickadee, feathers flood a swallow's nest. You can barely see the eggs or the babies for all the fluffy stuff. This year box 24 once again had a Tree Swallow in residence. By April 25<sup>th</sup> we had four eggs which hatched on May 16<sup>th</sup>. By June 13<sup>th</sup> the young had fledged and mom was back on a new nest two weeks later. Box 27 was a bit of a puzzle to start. The partial nest I found on April 9<sup>th</sup> had moss in it and made me think we had a second chickadee (I hadn't checked number 30 yet) nest started. Two weeks later and there were still no eggs. By week three feathers had been added and on May 9<sup>th</sup> eggs were found swaddled in a sea of feathers. Near the end of May the babies were active and by June 13 they had fledged.

July was a brutal month with record heat and the little rain came in violent thunder storms. This took its toll on some hatchling bluebirds. On July 11 I found a dead fledgling outside a box at Dowell Elementary. No evidence of foul play, just a dried up bird. The next day at box 28 at Cove Point I noticed a stink as I approached the box. Upon opening it I found two dead baby bluebirds maybe 12 days along. There was no sign of the other two babies, who I assume fledged successfully. Five days of the upper ninety's to triple digits apparently was too much for these two individuals. Although five broods fledged in July, nesting in general slowed down with only one clutch actually laid that month.

During the season there were thirteen attempts at nesting by Eastern Bluebirds. All thirteen broods successfully hatched. A total of fifty-eight babies were fledged. In addition three broods of Tree Swallows totaling thirteen young also made it out of the box and into the air. And two broods of chickadees also fledged totaling (again) thirteen young. On the last day of monitoring, August all boxes were empty of birds.



### Birds of Cove Point's Nesting Season

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		

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