

Bluebird Council 2021 Annual Report

Number of Volunteers: 23 volunteers (plus approximately 35 one-time or “plus one” volunteers)
Volunteer Hours: 1,109 hours

Project Leader: Mary Hollinger

Staff Liaison: Lydia Wells, Lydia.Wells@CalvertCountyMD.gov, 41-535-5327

Purpose and Objectives

Calvert County is located in Southern Maryland. A peninsula bordered on the west by the Patuxent River and on the east by the Chesapeake Bay, much of the county is rural with major agricultural crops being corn, soybeans and tobacco. Large, open fields bordered by woodlands are conducive to the presence of Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) who are year-round residents.

The Calvert Bluebird Council, headquartered at the Nature Center at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp oversees the monitoring of official trails with hundreds of boxes throughout the county. At season's end the results are compiled and submitted to the MD Bluebird Society.

Trails have between 10-40 bluebird nest boxes. Boxes are monitored weekly between late March/early April through August or September. Observers fill out a standard form collecting information on nest starts, number of eggs laid, number of eggs hatched and the number of young fledged. Most trails require walking, carrying a notebook and small toolkit. Some monitors may have to deal with high grass as the season wears on. Forms are to be submitted to the Trail Lead at the end of the season. The data is then compiled and submitted to the MD Bluebird Society to aid in ongoing population studies across MD and the US.

Besides monitoring, there is occasional need to install new trails. This includes digging post holes, setting 8' 4x4 posts, and attaching predator guards and the nest boxes to the posts.

Skills Needed

- Ability to drive to assigned bluebird trail
- Ability to walk through fields, sometimes with high grasses
- Ability to carry and use a screwdriver and other small tools
- Ability to accurately record data on a standard form, primarily for nest starts, number of eggs laid, number of eggs hatched and the number of young fledged.
- Ability to use a cell phone camera
- Ability to clean out nesting materials after each successful fledging, or unsuccessful nesting. A paint scraper and old toothbrush are useful for this task
- Ability and willingness to submit the recorded data at the end of the season

Volunteer Duties and Expectations

- Most trails require walking, carrying a notebook and small toolkit
- Some trails may have high grass as the season wears on, exposing monitors to ticks, chiggers and other biting insects, poison ivy and thorny plants
- In the Spring, an initial check of the boxes should be made to assess any damages over winter, and clean out any late or winter nesting materials. Rubbing Ivory soap or a thin layer of Vaseline on the ceiling and top 1" of the interior walls will help deter wasps
- Boxes should be cleaned of any nesting materials at the end of the season. A paint scraper and old

- toothbrush are useful for this task
- Although most boxes have predator guards, snakes are occasionally found in or near a box. A small snake hook is useful to have in the toolkit
- Boxes and posts will wear out over time. Monitors may report any needs to the Trail Lead or Project Manager to obtain replacements as needed. Monitors may replace the items themselves or ask for assistance.
- While most species of birds are acceptable in bluebird houses, and indeed not allowed to be disturbed, House Sparrows are an exception. Monitors should learn to identify these nests and eggs and take appropriate steps to help reduce these populations.
- Besides monitoring, there is occasional need to install new trails. This includes digging post holes, setting 8' 4x4 posts, and attaching predator guards and the nest boxes to the posts.
- It can often be helpful to take a quick cell phone photo of eggs and hatchlings to confirm counts later (e.g., if an egg or brood disappears, or something doesn't look right later in the record. A couple of photos also helps in counting young.)
- Volunteers are expected to enter their monitoring hours into the Calvert Stewards Portal

Training and Qualifications

- Volunteers are trained on site, provided with a map of the trail, blank CBC monitoring forms, and the NABS Factsheet "Monitoring Bluebird Nestboxes"
- Volunteers are provided with instructions for logging hours into the Calvert Galaxy Digital Portal

Summary of 2021 Activities

For a variety of reasons, data for 5 trails (76 boxes) were not included in this years summaries. Some did not report, some were insufficiently monitored. There are now 25 trails/426 boxes in the system; data for 20 trails/350 boxes were submitted and summarized.

- Hance Farms trail is officially closed (-10 boxes)
- Ward Farm Recreation and Nature Park lost 5 boxes due to the Park construction (-5)
- Gatewood's Box 4 was replaced after disappearing last season (+1)
- Box 5 was finally located Jefferson-Patterson Park (+1)
- The Calvert Industrial Park Box 8A was replaced and moved from its abandoned, ant-infested site (+1)
- One new box added to the Northern Middle School trail (+1)

Many trails replaced old boxes, added predator guards, moved boxes to better locations, etc. The most extensive effort was at JPPM where 20 boxes were replaced, boxes on garden posts were put on 4x4 posts, a rotting post was replaced, and 3 predator guards installed

Efforts to control House Sparrows continue. Dummy eggs were ordered, painted and distributed to NRL, Freedom Hill Horse Rescue, Calvert Industrial Park, Chesapeake Hills Golf Course, JPPM and Perigeax Vineyards trails. We are now experimenting with a two-hole box design at the Industrial Park and Chesapeake Hills. These boxes have been shown to give bluebirds an edge of HOSP

There were numerous turnovers and new monitors on board in 2021:

- Jennifer Horsmon took over the Biscoe-Gray Trail, west side boxes 5-23, and Shelley Packard covered the remaining 8 boxes on the east side boxes, and the 4 Grays Road Dog Park boxes
- Box Boxwell agreed to monitor the boxes on Turner Road that were part of the Hellen Creek Trail. Hellen Creek closed in 2019, and COVID stymied any action in 2020. Bob added 6 more boxes this year, bringing

that total to 10. He also provides data for 3 boxes at the Patuxent Business Park, and Cove Point reopened monitoring access for the 11 boxes located there, which Bob checks

- Lindsay Hollister agreed to monitor all 33 boxes at Jefferson-Patterson Park
- Jim Tetlow had to resign as monitor at Keim. William Bury briefly monitored the boxes to get his Master Naturalist hours. Once his hours were met, and the grass got too tall, Mary Hollinger took it over
- Shannon Gregory took on the new Mellomar trail, but a new job forced her to give it up. A new monitor has been assigned for 2022
- Kirsten Jabara is monitoring the new AnnMarie Gardens trail

Two new trails were installed in 2021:

- The Mellomar Golf Park trail in Owings finally came to fruition. 20 boxes were put in by CNS and Master Naturalist volunteers, and 12 installed by members of Girl Scout troop 5796, for a total of 32 boxes.
- Annmarie Gardens had an existing, but abandoned, bluebird trail. Staff Naturalist, Hester Burch was interested in reestablishing this trail, so 10 boxes and posts were provided and installed by CNS and CNS volunteers. AMG artists painted the boxes and posts prior to installation, so the trail meshes with the modality of the center.

Future Plans and Goals

We will continue the use of dummy HOSP eggs to reduce the number of these pests at several trail locations.

More 2-holed bird houses will be constructed and installed, also aimed at reducing the impact of HOSP predators. These boxes have been successfully tested and shown to give bluebirds 1) a chance to escape if a HOSP enters the box. Once outside, the bluebird can usually beat the HOSP 2) provide more wing spreading room for young 3) allow better air circulation, which can be critical with increasingly hot summers, and other benefits

A possible trail location in Huntingtown has been identified by Lori Sampson. The Property owner is very anxious to have one installed. Will follow up on this • Efforts to build new boxes and predator guards is ongoing

Efforts will be made to facilitate collecting all the data from all of the sites. This may require new monitors, or monitor teams, weekly data submissions, or something else.

2021 Results

TRAIL	# BOXES	NESTS	EGGS	HATCH	FLEDGE	FLEDGE/BOX	NESTS/BOX
AMG	11	1	4	3	3	0.27	0.09
BISCOE GRAY	20	27	100	86	82	4.10	1.35
CALVERT CO INDUST. PARK	25	28	98	97	95	3.80	1.12
CHES. HILLS GOLF COURSE	27	60	264	206	194	7.19	2.22
FAIR GROUNDS	14	19	63	53	47	3.36	1.36
GATEWOOD	16	20	59	39	28	1.75	1.25
JPPM	33	42	168	119	93	2.82	1.27
KINGS LANDING PARK	24	34	132	112	95	3.96	1.42
POPLARS FARM	27	20	68	64	58	2.15	0.74
MELLOMAR	32	12	31	30	30	0.94	0.38
Battle Creek / Flag Ponds	5	7	32	32	32	6.40	1.40
BUENA VISTA	12	23	79	68	62	5.17	1.92
CALVERTON	20	20	88	72	71	3.55	1.00
COVE PT NHT	13	8	31	20	20	1.54	0.62
FREEDOM HILL HORSE RESCUE	10	11	39	21	21	2.10	1.10
KEIM FOREST	8	6	24	23	20	2.50	0.75
NORTHERN MS	5	11	38	33	28	5.60	2.20
TRENTMAN FARMS	15	11	45	43	43	2.87	0.73
TURNER ROAD	13	24	94	79	76	5.85	1.85
WARD PARK	20	20	88	88	87	4.35	1.00
TOTAL 2021	350	404	1545	1288	1185	3.39	1.15

Supporting Calvert County's nature parks and natural spaces



CALVERT STEWARDS

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

A partnership between Calvert Nature Society and Calvert County Natural Resources Division

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CALVERT STEWARDS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
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Volunteer Portal: <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>

Calvert Nature Society: www.calvertparks.org

Calvert County Natural Resources Division:
www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources

