

Prothonotary Warbler Nest Box Project

2021 Report

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PROJECT GOALS:

- Increase conservation efforts at our parks where there is suitable habitat for Prothonotary Warblers (PROW).
- Involve the public by providing volunteer opportunities.
 - Monitor nest boxes
 - Build and install boxes
 - Data entry
 - Boardwalk surveys for color banded birds
- Increase public awareness by having some of the nest boxes visible from trails.
- Provide important data to researchers at Cornell.
- Install & monitor more boxes at additional park properties as they are acquired.
- Long term: determine a study we could do with PROW that may involve banding and perhaps even a nanotag.

SKILLS NEEDED

- Ability to collect detailed information and report it using a home computer or the NestWatch smart phone App.
- Can correctly identify nests and birds that are likely to use our nest boxes (Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Wrens, Carolina Chickadees, Prothonotary Warblers, and Wood Ducks).
- Able to hike at least a mile. Some of our nest boxes are easily accessed and others are more challenging, and the hike could be strenuous.

Optional, but Preferred, Skills

- Using the NestWatch App, Volunteers can instantly report the nest box data rather than writing it in a notebook and uploading it to the website on their home computers. *
 - * Cell phone signal is spotty in some of the parks, so an alternative is to use one of the “Rite in the Rain” notebooks provided to record nesting data and enter it all at once using the app when the volunteer is back at their vehicle. This also helps prevent phones from being dropped into the swamp.
- Able to use hand tools like loppers, pruners, screwdrivers, or drills to make repairs to boxes or to clear branches from the surrounding area.

REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

- Volunteers will be exposed to ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes, bees/wasps, poison ivy, bad weather, and other wildlife such as an occasional snake that may be able to reach the box.
- Due to varying challenges with each nest box trail, there are different minimum ages recommended for each. For safety reasons and to insure data is correctly reported, a supervising adult needs to accompany children under age 18.
- Volunteers may work independently or in family teams.
- Understand that “zero” or “no eggs” are important data, and that there could be times when all nest boxes are empty. It also helps establish beginning and end of season dates.
- After the initial training, volunteers should commit to at least one monitoring day per month throughout the nesting season.
- Although dogs are permitted at many of our parks, they should not accompany volunteers during nest box surveys.

VOLUNTEER DUTIES

- From March – August, at least once/month, volunteers will check all nest boxes at the site(s) they have committed to.
- They will note stage of nest, number of eggs, age of young, adult behavior, any pests present, and repairs that need to be made. Data will need to be submitted either using the NestWatch App or website.
- Occasionally, nest boxes will need to be replaced or repaired using hand tools or a battery-operated drill.
- If the volunteer feels comfortable doing so, they may occasionally have to evict ants, wasps or snakes from the nest boxes. So far, we haven’t had issues with House Sparrows or Cowbirds.
- At Cypress Swamp, volunteers need to wear chest waders to access half of the boxes and will also check the Wood Duck Boxes since they are in the same general area.
- We also have need for volunteers to do trail maintenance along the access paths and trim back branches around the nest boxes.
- **MD-DC Breeding Bird Atlas (2020-2024):** Volunteers are also encouraged to record their bird sightings and breeding behaviors on eBird for the Maryland-DC Breeding Bird Atlas by using the “MD-DC BBA” portal found under the eBird settings.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

- Interested volunteers should attend one of the training opportunities offered at each site they’re interested in monitoring.
- Afterwards, they will be qualified to sign up to monitor the nest boxes at that location as often as every 3 days within the nesting season. They do NOT need to requalify every season unless there are major changes to the nest box locations or to the NestWatch App and Website.
- At the beginning of the season, nest box maps and monitoring instructions are emailed to veteran nest box volunteers as a refresher.
- Volunteers can request a “Volunteer Parking Placard”
- Volunteers may be asked to take a nest photo quiz with eggs and various sizes of nestlings as part of their qualification.

RECOMMENDED STAFF TRAINING

- Continue apprenticing with Jo Lutmerding on the MAPS Project and have Gene Groshon apply for his Master Bander's Permit so that he will be able to continue banding when Andy Brown moves away.

PROJECT DATES

- **March:** If there are major repairs or new boxes that need to be installed, we usually have a nest box work day to accomplish that. We have a stockpile of nest boxes in the barn by Sixes Rd. Trainings are offered at each site this month too.
- **March-June:** monthly trainings are offered at each park.
- **March - August:** Nest boxes need to be checked at least once a week but can be checked as often as every 3 days at each site. On their monitoring days in 2020-2024, volunteers can also record data on eBird for the MD-DC Breeding Bird Atlas. Volunteers will sign up for monitoring opportunities using the Galaxy Digital Volunteer Portal.

2021 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Gene was having difficulties with project nest watch and accessing 2021 data so maintains an Excel spreadsheet of 2022 data.

We had successful Prothonotary nests at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp and Ward Farm. Gene banded 7 PROW nestlings with USGS bands and unique color bands at BC. Gene banded 4 PROW nestlings with USGS bands at Ward Farm. We had several Eastern Bluebird nests at BC. We had several Carolina Wren and Tufted Titmouse nests at Flag Ponds.

In 2021 we were able to begin color banding PROW. Gene color banded a total of 7 nestlings and 3 adults. One of the adults was a male PROW that was banded with a USGS band by Gene in 2020. This bird was given a red color band to its left leg. As part of the color banding project Gene had signs made and installed them on the boardwalk that will be used to report the location of color banded PROWs. Gene also created a pamphlet that is available in the nature center for visitors to use while on their hike to explain the project and allow them to collect re-sighting data. We're hoping that the banding data collected in years to come will give us some answers about their longevity and population trends as well as whether adults and nestlings return to the same nesting site.

Gene also created an exhibit in the nature center that features taxidermied Prothonotary Warblers and explains the markers and color banding project.

Total Volunteer Hours: 95

Volunteers: Karen Ritchie, Karen Anderson, Jessy Oberright, Joanne Simmons, Kirsten Jabara, Craig Simmons

FUTURE PLANS

- Gene will create opportunities for volunteers to walk the boardwalk in search of color banded PROWs. This specific opportunity should help increase our re-sightings and get us more data than just from visitors.



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

