

Calvert Bluebird Council Nest Monitoring 2023 Annual Report

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Trail Lead: Mary Hollinger, canoe2@comcast.net

Number of Volunteers: 23 plus numerous “one-time” volunteers

Volunteer Hours: 867; Miles Traveled: 5,735

PURPOSE

The Calvert Bluebird Council, a volunteer research opportunity led by Calvert Nature Society and Calvert County Natural Resources Division, oversees the monitoring of 29 official trails with 474 boxes throughout the County. Trails have between 5-33 bluebird nest boxes, which are monitored weekly between mid-March/early April through August or September. The collected data are submitted at the end of the season. The data are then compiled and submitted to the MD Bluebird Society to aid in ongoing population studies across MD and the US.

Annual summaries are posted on the Calvert Nature Society web page:

https://www.calvertparks.org/bluebird_project.html

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

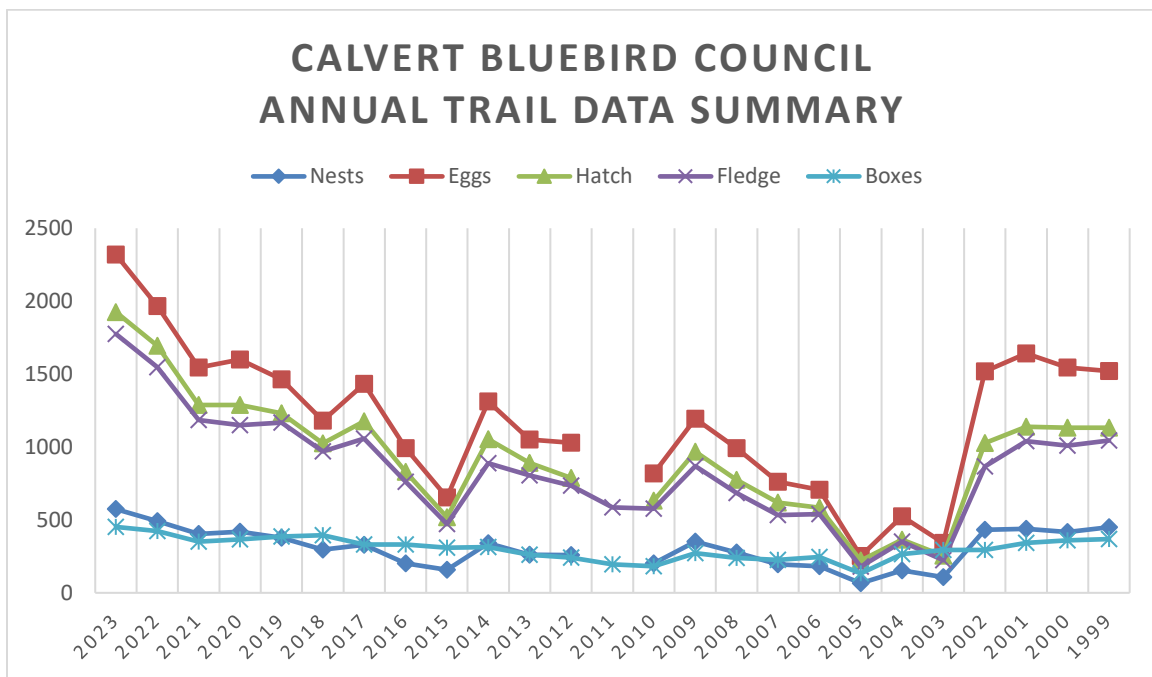
Manager to obtain replacements as needed. Monitors may replace the items themselves or ask for assistance.

- 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
- Volunteers are expected to turn their data in by the end of the season

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 2023 ACTIVITIES



We currently have 23 CNS monitors assigned to 29 existing trails. These monitors often include their spouses, friends and other family members in their duties. There was some shifting of trail monitoring in 2023, which resulted in 4 new monitors this year.

- Art Wittig passed away in December 2022, as a result Lori Sampson took over the Fairgrounds Trail.
- Mary Hollinger took over the Calvert Industrial Park from Lori Sampson.
- Janet Hurst moved and resigned her position as a BBM volunteer, resulting in Alexis Allen taking over the Freedom Hill Trail.
- Kathleen Smith replaced Belinda Black at the Biscoe-Gray trail (south side) and Maggie Silverman took the north side for Mary Hollinger.
- Katelin Wells turned over monitoring of the Perigeaux Vineyards trail to Ed Connor.
- Lindsay Hollister recruited a team to help her monitor the boxes at Jefferson-Patterson Park.
- Anita Hacker started monitoring the boxes at the North Beach Wetlands Park.

- 3 new trails added and monitored this year:
 - Hallowing point Park trail opened in 2022, but too late in the season to get any activity.
 - A monitor was assigned to the Wetlands Overlook Park in North Beach.
 - Brady Farms trail was installed and opened.
- Of the 28 trails, all but one reported at the end of the year, for a total of 452 boxes - up from the 423 reported on last year.
- Box 2 at Barstow Elementary was ripped off its post and torn apart. The box was replaced and moved to a more secure location away from the playground area.
- Extensive work done at the Fairgrounds trail replacing boxes and posts as needed. Put signs on boxes explaining their purpose. No trail map was available, but we located all but one box.
- Replaced 4 boxes at Calverton and added 2 new box sites, increasing their total to 22 boxes.
- Replaced 3 boxes at Chesapeake Hills Golf Course, north side, and signs added to the existing boxes.
- Replaced 1 box at Freedom Hill Horse Rescue, 2 boxes moved to different locations.
- 1 box vandalized or possibly destroyed by grounds keepers, at Mellomar Golf Park. Did not replace.
- 1 box vandalized twice at Hallowing Point Park. Box and post removed permanently.
- Moved 6 boxes and added or replaced 4 baffles at Jefferson-Patterson Park.
- Replaced 2 boxes at Perigeaux Vineyards.
- Added an additional box at St. Pauls (an extension of the Fairgrounds trail).
- Ward Park increased to 26 boxes, which put them back to their 2018-2020 capacity. Predator guards added to 4 posts.
- 17 box trail was installed in Huntingtown on the Brady Farm in February.
- Worked with Lisa Garrett at the North Beach Wetlands Overlook Park, to assess that trail and get those boxes monitored.
- At their request, explored the Fishing Creek animal shelter site for possible bluebird trail.
- Materials purchased and assembled for 24 new predator guards.
- Nearly half of the monitors used Google Sheets to collect and/or submit their data, which helped tremendously in getting the data turned in and compiled in a timely manner this year.
- Data are also submitted and included for the BCNS PROW boxes.
- Annmarie Gardens again invited us to set up a bluebird display at the Earth Fest, to highlight the purpose of the bluebird trail reinstalled there in 2021.

2023 Analysis:

2023 was another great year for Bluebirds in Calvert County.

- Total number of chicks fledged was 1775, a new record.
 - This number broke previous record for number of fledges by more than 30% even though the number of boxes was up only 21%. This could mean that site selection for box placement is very good.
- The assumption that box placement is good is also supported by the fact that we are seeing a slightly higher percentage of use.
- Average eggs per nest was up 4.7% (4.0 from 3.82) reflecting fewer nest abandonments.
- The hatch rate increased by 3.6% (83-86%) indicating less egg loss.
 - Most common egg loss is due to House Sparrows.
- The fledge rate remained the same at 91.5% which is exceptional.
 - This indicates low predation, which could be indicative that the box guards are working.
- Nests per box is unchanged but fledge per nest and fledge per box were up 7.9%, again reflecting lower loss of nestlings from predation.
- The ratio of fledged chicks per box reached 3.93.
 - This is the highest recorded since the project began in 1988.

FUTURE PLANS

- A new 5 box trail has been installed at a property owned by St. Paul's in Prince Frederick. Lori Sampson will begin monitoring this trail in spring of 2024.
- Efforts to build new houses and predator guards is ongoing.
 - Lydia is exploring the option of constructing (pre-fab) nest boxes with scouts as part of a badge program.
- Spring Volunteer Kickoff Meeting – tentatively scheduled for the week of 3/11/24-3/15/24
- End of Season Wrap Up Meeting – tentatively scheduled for the week of 10/14/24-10/18/24
- Ideas for appreciation:
 - Bring supplies to the volunteer meetings that can be used to replenish their monitoring kits (i.e. toothbrushes, bug spray, sunscreen, guidebooks, 1st aid supplies, etc).
 - Continue to provide light refreshments at the volunteer meetings.
 - Send an end of season email that includes the monitoring report.
 - Send card or email to volunteers on their birthday's and during the holidays (if mailing address or email if available).
 - Highlight the bluebird monitor volunteers in an April social media post

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

