

# Prothonotary Warbler Nest Box Project 2022 Annual Report

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**Total Nest Box Monitoring Hours: 22**

**Total Prothonotary Survey Hours: 22**

## 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.

## VOLUNTEERS

### 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 to volunteers as part of their qualification.

## RECOMMENDED STAFF TRAINING

- Gene obtained his own Master Banding Permit through the Bird Banding Lab.

## 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.

## 2022 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

We had one successful Prothonotary nest at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp. There are possible other nests we missed due to less volunteers monitoring. We also experienced competition between Bluebirds and Prothonotaries. There were Prothonotaries seen building a nest in a natural cavity in a cypress knee. We were not able to monitor this nest to see if it was successful. Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Wrens and Carolina Chickadees were documented as attempting to nest in some of the boxes as well.

In 2022, we had 2 banded PROW that were seen at Battle Creek, Red color band and Red-Yellow color band. Gene banded one PROW fledgling at Battle Creek with USGS bands and unique color bands.

We had a few volunteers complete surveys searching for the color banded birds. Rick Smith performed several surveys while looking for dragonflies and submitted several reports of the color banded birds being seen from the boardwalk at Battle Creek. We had a few visitors turn in their data sheets but they were not confident on what bands they saw but we are glad to see folks participating.

Unfortunately, this year we did not have any successful Prothonotary nests at Ward Farm. This is the first time this has happened since 2018 when we started the project. Nest Box Ward PW4 has had a successful Prothonotary Warbler nest in it every year since the 2019 breeding season. This includes 2 years of multiple successful nests in one season for a total of 5 successful broods of young. There were no nest attempts by Prothonotary Warblers at this site in 2022 and this is most likely due to the habitat destruction associated with the excessive clearing for the staging area and dam updates in the vicinity of this box. We also did not capture any Prothonotary Warblers during our MAPS banding program at Ward Farm perhaps being from the excessive clearing. Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Wrens and Carolina Chickadees were documented as attempting to nest in some of the boxes as well.

We had no Prothonotary Warbler nest attempts at Flag Ponds. Carolina Wrens and Eastern Bluebirds were seen nesting in the nest boxes.

Gene added a nest with replica eggs to the Prothonotary Warbler nature center exhibit.

## FUTURE PLANS

- Install new boxes with smaller holes to hopefully eliminate or reduce competition from Eastern Bluebirds.
- Promote the survey opportunity to more volunteers as well as teen birders in our area.
- Create signage and possibly a QR code to be put along the boardwalk or in the nature center to get more visitors to participate in the surveys.

*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](http://www.calvertparks.org)

Calvert County Natural Resources Division:  
[www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources](http://www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources)

