

# About Nest Boxes

## ***Introduction***

The most important Prescott volunteer effort is the construction, placement, and monitoring of nest boxes in appropriate habitat for bluebirds. Most monitors have twenty to thirty boxes placed on posts in homeowner backyards or power poles along country roads.

- Construction** Nest boxes are built by Prescott volunteer carpenters and are stored in a central location with other equipment, such as metal fence posts and predator guards. Monitors are not required to build boxes. Boxes and related supplies are provided free of charge to our volunteers.
- Design** Prescott nest boxes follow standard plans that monitors can distribute to homeowners upon request (sample plans are included in this section). Both side-opening and front-opening boxes have entrance holes of 1.5 inches, perfect for bluebirds and too small for starlings and woodpeckers. Each box has pre-drilled holes for ease of mounting with nails or screws, comes with a small metal label stapled on the side for inscribing the box number, and is identified with the Prescott name.
- Obtaining boxes** Monitors work with an assigned bander who is the primary contact for obtaining nest boxes and other equipment.

## ***Site Selection***

The highly specialized needs of western bluebirds require careful attention to detail in selecting sites for nest box placement. Also review “Siting the Box” in the booklet, *Enjoying Bluebirds More*.

- Best locations** The best locations for nest boxes are rural areas at higher elevations. Good sites are large mowed yards, fenced pastures, short grasslands, cemeteries, rural golf courses, clear-cuts, forest burn areas, and vineyards where pesticides are not heavily applied. Organic gardens and farms provide good habitat.
- Mounting boxes** Always place a box in a safe and convenient location where you can park easily and walk to it in a reasonable amount of time. It should be four to six feet above the ground, at a height that is easy for monitoring, near overhead utility wires or near a tree or high perch where the male bluebird can more easily defend his family from predators.
- Permission** Always ask permission from property owners before placing nest boxes on private property. Often homeowners have a preferred location that can be viewed from their homes.
- Power poles** Prescott has permission to mount nest boxes on power poles throughout the Willamette Valley. Carefully place them so as to not interfere with utility company labels and other equipment.
- Posts, trees** Nail or screw boxes to wooden fence posts or trees, such as isolated oaks or nut trees at the edge of an orchard. Attach boxes to metal poles or fence posts using devices Prescott supplies.

## About Nest Boxes

- Positioning boxes
- Generally position the nest box hole toward the east or south to reduce rain and wind entering from storms that blow out of the north and west.
  - The hole should face a fence line or a tree or perch within 100 feet to ensure a fledgling's first flight is successful.
  - On power poles, face the opening away from traffic, taking care not to cover or interfere with existing utility equipment or labels.
  - Bluebirds are territorial, so keep the nest boxes at least 300 feet apart and out of sight of each other.
  - If bluebirds and swallows are competing for the same nest box, place another box on the opposite side of the same post or tree or mount one within 10 feet of the first nest box. The swallows may use one box and the bluebirds the other (see *Predator and Competitor Control* for details).
- Avoid brushy or wet areas
- Avoid brushy areas to minimize competition from wrens, and marshes, lakes, or streams to minimize competition from swallows.

### **Nest box numbers**

Each box is assigned a unique seven-character identifier based on the box location. The identifier is taken from *The Thomas Guide* map pages. For example, a box numbered 715A201 is the first box located in a geographical area that corresponds to map page 715, in column A and row 2. The final two digits are assigned from our database as new boxes are placed in the 715A2xx area, so the second box would be 715A202, and so on. Always confer with your bander before assigning numbers or when you discover a discrepancy in your records.

### Accurate records

Keeping accurate records of nest box locations is important in case you are unable to monitor your route and a substitute is called in. New monitors and substitute monitors need accurate box numbers and location descriptions on monitoring forms to find each box easily. (See the PBRP Nest Box Monitoring Form in the *Forms* section of this manual for a sample.)

### Double boxes

Placing a second nest box on the same post or power pole or within 10 feet of a box being used by bluebirds often helps reduce competition from swallows. Both species have an opportunity to nest and seem to tolerate the proximity.

**NOTE:** A second nest box number is not required for the second box. When bluebirds occupy one box in a double-box set, use the same number for either box.

### GPS

For our reports to the Bird Banding Lab, we take a GPS (Global Positioning System) reading for each box. A GPS measures the exact location and elevation of each nest box. Coordinate with your bander to insure that each **new** nest box is GPS'd. (PBRP owns and will loan a GPS unit.)

**NOTE:** If you move a nest box more than 100 feet in any direction, you will need to assign a new nest box number to the box and collect a new GPS reading. This will insure that all of our records are correctly associated with the exact location of each breeding attempt. You can use the same box but tear off the old metal tag and put on a new tag with a new number. Report this action on the New or Changed Nest Box Form