

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

AN AFFILIATE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

Published in Portland, Oregon for Western Bluebird recovery in the Willamette Valley
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CHANGING TIMES....

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project will get new officers, steering committee, ways of communicating its mission

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rescott Bluebird Recovery Project has been growing rapidly over the past five years. The number of bluebirds banded in 2000 was almost three times the number banded in 1996. More bluebirds mean more nest boxes, more monitors and more work for those in leadership roles. There is too much clerical and administrative work for a limited number of volunteers, and changes are happening now to fix these problems, including election of new officers and designation of a new steering committee (see page 5).

As most of you know, Pat Johnston, Brenda McGowan and Marilynne Keyser are the main officers of PBRP. In addition to their heavy banding responsibilities, Pat and Brenda have served as president and secretary/treasurer of PBRP, respectively. Marilynne has served as education coordinator and database manager in addition to her banding duties. They have provided most of the leadership and handled most of the administration work, with help the past three years from a small steering committee. All three of these women seek reduced responsibilities in 2001.

Pat will retire from the role of president in September. Fred Robinson, a monitor and bander with years of experience, has agreed to be nominated to serve a two-year term as president. Pat will serve as past-president. Corinne Stefanick, a new bander, will take over some of Pat's banding routes. Brenda will give up the position of secretary but remain as treasurer. Shelly Othus, a new bander, will take over some of Brenda's banding routes. Marilynne Keyser will be moving to Terrebonne in Central Oregon. She will continue to be the database coordinator. Lauri Kunzman, a new bander, will take over all of Marilynne's banding routes. Shelly Walker, who has taken a full-time job, will hand over most of her banding routes to another new bander, Dave Flaming.

Lauri Kunzman also will take over Shelly Walker's responsibilities for public relations/events. Dave Flaming will handle web page inquiries and respond to questions left on our new voicemail system. He also will coordinate field trips and slide presentations. Martha Stewart has agreed to take over editorship of our newsletter from Jenny Valdivia.

Amendments to the by-laws of the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project that reflect these changes will be presented for vote at our September 22 meeting at Champoeg Heritage Center. A vote to elect new officers will be held at that time. Please plan to attend this meeting - it will shape the future of this important organization!



PBRP has voicemail and a new website!..See page 4

Mealworm Policy

Although popular with some landowners, the coordination and distribution of mealworms throughout the breeding season is taking cutting into other more productive activities. We encourage landowners to provide mealworms during the cold, rainy spring weather. We also encourage monitors to leave worms whenever they visit an active bluebird nest to facilitate trapping adults during the banding process.

PBRP will purchase and distribute mealworms to monitors through their banders. Monitors will not be required to pay for the mealworms they use for the active nests they visit. However, when monitors furnish mealworms to landowners, monitors are encouraged to ask for a \$5 contribution (**our** cost). Send money collected from landowners to: Brenda McGowan, PO Box 1469, Sherwood, OR 97140.

PBRP will not distribute mealworms after the majority of bluebirds complete their first clutches except in special situations. **It is not PBRP's policy to continue feeding mealworms during the remainder of the breeding season. However, landowners and monitors can make their own decisions about this.** Mealworms can be obtained directly from Sunshine Mealworms in Silverton, Oregon by calling 1-800-322-1100, or can be purchased from local bird shops.

With this new policy PBRP monitors are freer to focus on finding better locations for nest boxes, help landowners develop bluebird habitat and manage predator problems.

Prescott Talks & Field Trips

April 2

Carol Shillito gives talk for Cooper Mountain Book Club

April 12

Corrine Stefanick gives slide show for Sherwood Daughters of the American Revolution

May 26

Lauri Kunzman & Shelly Othus lead Champoeg field trip/TV spot for Eccles Elementary School

June 2

Sue Carr & Dave Flaming lead Champoeg field trip for Back Yard Bird Shop

June 9

Norine Dietrich leads Champoeg field trip for Wild Birds Unlimited

Lynn Ahern leads Champoeg field trip for the Environmental Learning Center

June 23

Sam Pointer leads Champoeg field trip for Audubon Society of Portland

THANKS EVERYBODY!

PBRP is grateful to the following individuals, organizations and businesses for donating \$50 or more:

Ann Groman

Patricia Broome

Lauri Kunzman

Joe Yesenofski

Sandy and Ben Bole

Soroptomist International of Vancouver

David and Merla Beltz

Fran Fulwiler and Marshall Page

Estelle Barbur

Daniel and Patricia Knox

Carol Santesson

Eloise Binns (in honor of Betty and Hank

Jorgensen's 50th anniversary)

All the anonymous donors who put money in the jars at Backyard Bird shops

We especially thank Mail Boxes Etc., owner Marc Kline, who tirelessly prints our newsletter at his Sherwood store!

HELP CONSERVE THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD

The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project is a nonprofit 501C(3) organization operated entirely by volunteers. Since we require no dues, your tax-deductible contribution is essential to our continued success. Expenses include the cost of printing and mailing newsletters and educational materials, training of volunteers and purchasing lumber and other materials for building and mounting nest boxes. Mealworms are sold at cost to property owners. Please send your contributions to PO Box 1469, Sherwood, OR 97140. Our tax identification number is 93-1021520.

Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation Gives \$2,000 Grant to PBRP

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project volunteers began banding Western Bluebirds in 1988. Since 1995, we have captured this data in a database designed with Microsoft Access software. During that time, 6,695 birds have been banded and 1,019 previously banded adult birds have been recovered. There is clear evidence that the efforts of PBRP have contributed significantly to population growth of western bluebirds in the lower Willamette Valley. Up to this point, the vast amount of data collected by PBRP has not been utilized. That is about to be remedied with a generous grant from the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation. Marilynne Keyser and her daughter, Amber Keyser, a doctoral candidate in population genetics at the University of Georgia, are principal investigators.

The goal of current research efforts is to use these data to expand the scientific body of knowledge and to inform future conservation decisions by PBRP and others interested in increasing the population of western bluebirds in the lower Willamette Valley. The analyses funded by OWHF will address three areas: female reproductive success; female dispersal, and population growth.

We will track female productivity (number and hatchability of eggs) for individual matriarchal lineages to determine if daughters resemble mothers in number of eggs laid and hatched. We hope to answer these questions: Do certain females consistently lay larger clutches? Do some females have lower hatching success in second clutches? Do "super females" contribute disproportionately to population increases? This should help determine whether additional efforts should be made to support nesting efforts by selected females.

In western bluebirds, females are the dispersing sex while males often stay in the area in which they were hatched and may even assist their parents to raise later clutches. We hope to answer the question: What is the average dispersal distance for females? This should help determine where the placement of nest boxes will assist in range expansion.

We will calculate age-specific survival and fecundity rates to estimate the current rate of population growth for this population of Western Bluebirds. We hope to answer the question: Which age group has the greatest influence on population growth rate? This should help determine where future conservation efforts should be targeted.

Western Bluebird Recovery Efforts Paying Off

During the year 2000 breeding season, volunteers monitoring nest boxes for the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project documented 456 nesting attempts by Western Bluebirds. Seventy-seven percent of these were successful, fledging 1467 young bluebirds. The average clutch size was 5 eggs. On average 4 eggs hatched per clutch and 3 young fledged.

Licensed banders banded 1629 nestlings and 104 adult birds and recaptured 361 previously banded adult birds. All birds were banded and recovered at artificial nest boxes located in Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Washington and Yamhill counties.

One of the recovered birds is a new longevity record according to the Bird Banding Laboratory. A male Western Bluebird (1511-37296) that had been banded as a nestling by Brenda McGowan in Sherwood OR on 11 July 1994 was recaptured by Marilynne Keyser as a breeding male at a nest box near his natal site on 14 June 2000, making him 5 years 11 months old.

The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the recovery, restoration, and enhancement of the Western Bluebird and other native cavity nesting birds. The Western Bluebird is on the Oregon Sensitive Species List as "vulnerable." Habitat loss, pesticides and competition from the European Starling and House Sparrow have been the primary factors contributing to the decline of this once common songbird.

A good place to see the Western Bluebird is at Champoeg State Heritage Area. The Champoeg Bluebird Festival on June 16th offers video and slide presentations, field trips and nest box building workshops. For more information, check out the Prescott website:

www.prescottbluebird.com.

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Controlling House Sparrows

House sparrows are non-native birds that are really a variety of weaver finch. They were introduced to the United States in Brooklyn, New York around 1850 and spread across the entire lower 48 states in only 50 years. House sparrows are aggressive and take readily to nest boxes. Bluebird boxes have a one-and-a-half inch hole that excludes starlings, but is not small enough to keep out house sparrows. House sparrows will destroy eggs, kill chicks and sometimes even kill the brooding female. The male house sparrow forms a strong bond to the nesting site and attracts his mate to it. If the female is killed or the nest is removed, the male will continue to rebuild the nest several times before he abandons the box. A house sparrow nest is easily identified – long grass that is messily jammed all the way up to the top of the box. There are often several pieces of grass sticking out of the box.

Tree swallows and violet-green swallows, on the other hand, are native birds that often use bluebird boxes. These beautiful, sleek songbirds feed on mosquitos, moths and other insects. Wrens, chickadees and nuthatches also use nest boxes. The active nests of native birds are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and should not be disturbed. House sparrows (and starlings too) are not protected under this law, and their nests may be removed or destroyed. The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project recommends the following to control non-native birds:

- Put up a chickadee box if you live in a suburban area. The hole should be 1 ¼ inches wide to discourage house sparrows
- Place bluebird boxes at least 1,000 feet away from barns and livestock areas and chicken coops (sparrows feed on grain in these areas)
- Remove and discard house sparrow nests until the male gives up on the box

New website and voicemail system!

All PBRP handouts now feature a phone number for our new voicemail line, **503-245-8449**. Dave Flaming is the “voice of PBRP” and also monitors the line, returning calls and mailing out materials.

Mark Jager and his technologically-gifted group of volunteers recently revamped our website www.prescottbluebird.com. Anyone doing an internet search for “western bluebird” will be find our website is the first link among all the sites available.

Visit us often for the latest news on the western bluebird and PBRP activities. Add our website to your ‘favorites’ list!

GI Joe's offers 20% discount on handwarmers

John Huebner, Sporting Goods Manager at G.I. Joe's in Tualatin has offered PBRP volunteers a 20% discount on handwarmers purchased from that store. Identify yourself as a volunteer to receive this discount.

John became interested in PBRP when new volunteer Karen Russell visited the store recently searching for handwarmers in preparation for nesting season. When John found out that PBRP uses them to keep nestling western bluebirds alive during cold spring weather, he offered the discount.

Thank you Tualatin GI Joe's for helping us help bluebirds!

NABS Annual Convention 2001

The North American Bluebird Society's annual convention will be held June 21-24, 2001 in Columbus, Ohio. If anyone from the PBRP would like to attend, we may be able to help finance the trip. This is a great place to showcase what PBRP is doing for western bluebirds.

Guest speaker at this year's convention will be Julie Zickafoose, wildlife artist and author.

Sign up soon !
www.nabluebirdsociety.org

WANTED....

We need 64 oz., and 128 oz., apple and cranberry juice bottles. The tops are used to make baffles for our PVC raccoon guard and the bottoms are used for mealworm feeders. Also, we are in need of metal posts to mount our nest-boxes. Diameters of 1" to 2 1/2" and in a 7' length are best and can be electrical conduit or galvanized posts. Please contact Dan Brown if you have these items and he will pick them up, 503-554-1283, dbrown@teleport.com

ALSO, We have a supply of Noel Wire Predator Guards. The Noel guard is hardware cloth folded into a 3"x 5" rectangle that attaches over the nestbox entrance. It deters raccoons and avian predators. Guards come with the necessary phillips screws and washers. If you attach one to a PBRP front-opening box be aware that you will have to remove it to open the box. Contact your bander or Dan Brown.

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Pat Johnston 7717 SW 50 th Ave. Portland, OR 97219	503-246-1337		President Bander
Fred Robinson 16885 NE Nelson Rd. Newberg, OR 97132	503-538-7733	Forester@open.org	President-elect Bander
Brenda McGowan 23340 SW Kruger Rd. Sherwood, OR 97140	503-625-6786		Treasurer Bander
Corinne Stefanick 7105 SE 16 th Street Portland, OR 97202	503-233-8946	Corinnes@jps.net	Secretary Bander
Martha Stewart 8810 SE Eola Hills Rd. Amity, OR 97129	503-835-3903	Stewartm@viclink.com	Newsletter (beginning Fall 2001)
Lauri Kunzman 25868 NE Glass Rd. Aurora, OR 97002	503-678-1447	Kunziljk@aol.com	PR/Events Bander
Jim & Barby Conroy 31771 SW Laurelview Rd. Hillsboro, OR 97123	503-628-0330	Uncletom98@aol.com	Finance
Dan Brown 1229 Creekside Ln. Newberg, OR 97132	503-554-1283	Dlbrown@teleport.com	Nest Box
Marilynne Keyser 32420 Armitage Rd. Wilsonville, OR 97070	503-694-2738 503-803-1310	Mtkeyser@aol.com	Database/Research
Ellen Stevenson & Mark Jager 321 NW Overlook Dr. Vancouver, WA 98665	360-695-9204	Ellenstevenson@yahoo.com Markjager@yahoo.com	Bander Web Master
Shelly & Tygh Walker 12165 SW 124 th Ave. Tigard, OR 97223	503-590-4927	ShellyW@spiritone.com Tygh@spiritone.com	Bander Computer Consultant
Dave Flaming 12135 SW 123 rd Ct. Tigard, OR 97223	503-590-2331	Dflaming@spiritone.com	Voice of Prescott Bander
Dennis Wiley 7679 Champoeg Rd. NE St. Paul, OR 97137	503-678-1251 X303 (*230)	Dennis.wiley@state.or.us	Bander
Pam Reid 16500 Scotts Mill Rd. NE Silverton, OR 97381	503-845-2431	Johnt@open.org	Bander
Shelly Othus 5459 SW Joshua St. Tualatin, OR 97062	503-691-5819	Storylin@teleport.com	Bander

PBRP FEATURED AT 2001 YARD GARDEN AND PATIO SHOW

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project was honored to be guests of KXL's "In The Garden With Mike Darcy" at this years 2001 Yard Garden and Patio Show held February 23, 24, and 25 at the Oregon Convention Center. Mike Darcy has been a truly dedicated enthusiast of the Western Bluebird and Prescott's efforts and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to him. This was a wonderfully unique opportunity for PBRP to reach the public in furthering our educational goal of providing information and supplies in our quest to provide nesting rehabilitation for the Western Bluebird in the Willamette Valley. During the show we distributed 84 nesting boxes as kits or assembled on site.

Through the generous donation of plywood from Tualatin Valley Builders Supply and talented carpenter Jack Stennett, nest box coordinator Dan Brown cut and packaged numerous ready to assemble kits. The majority of boxes were for bluebirds, however, we also distributed several chickadee nest boxes for urban gardens. A \$10 donation to PBRP was gratefully accepted.

Our volunteer carpenters led by Dan Brown included Dave Elliott, Dave Flaming, Ron Kunzman, Sam Pointer, Charlie Stalzer and Jeff Weise. Volunteers donating their time to educate others about bluebirds and other cavity nesters included Pat Johnston, Shelly Othus, Lauri Kunzman, Larie Stalzer and Corinne Stefanick.

Thoughts for Spring....

As we look forward to the coming nesting season, a few thoughts come to mind.

We have had a really fantastic carry-over of bluebirds this winter, due mainly to mild weather. People have reported flocks of four to nine bluebirds all winter.

Birds have been inspecting boxes and acting like they might start nesting this past month. Hopefully they're not serious because early nesting attempts often fail. Many times nestlings can be saved by the judicious use of mealworms as supplementary food, but the fact is that we cannot save every bluebird that hatches, and Mother Nature never intended that they should all survive. That is why bluebirds are programmed to have a second clutch.

This second clutch is important in many ways, Think for a minute about the food chain, which we humans belong to as well as our animal and bird friends. We are fortunate enough to be at the top of the chain, but bluebirds and other birds are not so lucky. Bluebirds eat mostly insects, which are below them in the food chain, and bluebirds themselves are eaten by birds and animals that are higher up the chain. This is a fact of life that we cannot ignore, but seldom think about.

It is no accident that birds nest in the spring when insects are plentiful; this means they will have adequate food for their young. And it is no accident that hawks, jays, crows and raccoons take the eggs and nestlings of other species – they need to feed their young, too. It's a tough life out there, but it's part of the natural cycle. We have to accept the fact that there will always be bluebird deaths and nest failures. The causes could be cold, wet weather, or predation or missing parent birds. Our responsibility is to make sure that the nest boxes are as secure as can be; that they are dry inside, as predator-proof as practical, and that they are placed in appropriate territory.

Another point to consider is the tremendous competition for nest boxes by other cavity nesters. All cavity nesters are in big trouble because of lack of appropriate homes. If chickadees or wrens take over nest boxes, don't begrudge them. They have to raise a family, too. Leave the boxes for them and put up more boxes for bluebirds in better habitat, away from shrubs and brush.

Swallows and bluebirds frequently do battle for the same nest box, since they both favor the same habitat. Placing another nest box on the same post or tree will frequently solve the problem. Supposedly, swallows will take the higher of the two, so make sure that one box is about a foot higher than the other, and facing a different direction (away from prevailing storms). Having swallows nesting in close proximity to bluebirds is beneficial to bluebirds because swallows defend the space around the boxes from intruders.

Remember, too, that swallows have a short time to raise young because they must make the long migration south by the end of summer. Bluebirds have the advantage of producing more than one clutch since they only migrate locally to lower elevations. Swallows have been observed helping to feed bluebird nestlings, and the arrangement seems to be that as soon as the bluebirds have fledged the swallows will use the box for their own family. After the swallows are finished using the nest box, the bluebirds will still have time for their second clutch.

Notice that I've only talked about native animals. No mention of house sparrows, starlings or cats. The problem of non-natives and their impacts to native birds are being addressed in a variety of ways, but the damage will continue as long as the non-natives are around.

The important thing is for us to observe nature and learn how we and our birds fit into the natural scheme of things, so we can help Mother Nature, not hinder her. After all, she has been doing a marvelous job for all these many centuries. She has a lot to teach if we will only pay attention.

--Pat Johnston

A Primer on Bluebird Decline

Clip-and-use fact sheet from the North American Bluebird Society

Over the years, land has been cleared for housing and industrial developments, shopping malls, highways, and cropland; many old trees have been cut down for firewood. Wooden fence posts (and natural tree cavities) that provided nesting cavities have now been replaced with metal posts. With modernization, the supply of natural nesting cavities for bluebirds and other native cavity nesters has been greatly reduced.

Compounding the problem of habitat loss has been the introduction into North America of two imported species - the House Sparrow and the European Starling. Both starlings and sparrows are cavity nesters, and both are very aggressive. House Sparrows are small enough to enter any hole that a bluebird can, and are so aggressive that they will chase away the more timid bluebird. Starlings can be excluded from bluebird boxes by using the correct size entrance hole, but will out-compete bluebirds for woodpecker holes and other natural nesting cavities.

During the summer, bluebirds feed mainly on insects. In the winter, bluebirds depend on many kinds of wild berries for their food supply. However, the supply of wild berries has also decreased over the years. The few berries that remain are often stripped quickly by large flocks of starlings.

Even though the bluebird population has greatly decreased, the future can still be promising for them. The most important step we can take to help bring back the bluebird is to provide nesting sites by setting out a bluebird box or starting a bluebird trail. A bluebird trail is a series of bluebird boxes placed along a prescribed route. In areas where nesting boxes have been put up in suitable habitat, bluebird populations are increasing. Bluebirding is a great environmental, hands-on project that people of all ages can enjoy. By following the instructions below, chances are good that you will be able to attract and enjoy bluebirds. ❖

BLUEBIRD NESTING RESULTS BY YEAR

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
Nesting Attempts	273	398	389	457
Failed Attempts	55	137	119	103
% Successful	80%	66%	69%	77%
% Failed	20%	34%	31%	23%
Eggs Laid	1342	1964	1941	2323
Eggs per Attempt	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.1
Young Hatched	1115	1471	1480	1843
% Hatched	83%	75%	76%	79%
Young Banded	939	1198	1299	1629
% Banded	84%	81%	88%	89%
Young Fledged	972	1045	1159	1467
% Fledged	87%	71%	78%	80%





Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project
PO Box 1469
Sherwood, OR 97140-1469

spring 2001 Newsletter

Mountain Chickadees Incubate, Fledge Mountain Bluebirds

Last Summer a pair of mountain bluebirds laid four eggs in one of our central Oregon boxes. But then we noticed that a pair of mountain chickadees were vigorously defending the box which had a furry, chickadee-style coverlet warming two chickadee eggs in addition to the four bluebird eggs. Only the bluebird eggs hatched.

The chickadee parents fed the bluebird nestlings a diet of mostly caterpillars rather than crickets and grasshoppers and all four nestlings fledged. When we cleaned out the box we found three undeveloped chickadee eggs pushed down to the bottom. I think the female bluebird died after laying and the male abandoned the nest. When the chickadees took over, they must have sensed that the eggs were still viable. The pair remodeled the nest around the eggs rather than build a new one on top of the eggs. Perhaps the chickadee eggs fell through the cracks between the bigger bluebird eggs and did not stay warm enough to develop.

Charlotte Corkran, Portland Oregon
(Excerpted from *Bluebird*, Spring 2001)