Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

AN AFFILIATE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY - Portland, OR

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More Bluebirds Banded and Recaptured in 1999

In 1999, two new banders joined Pat, Brenda and Marilynne to band a record number of nestling and adult bluebirds. With the help of Shelly Walker and Fred Robinson, we banded 1,299 nestlings and 104 adults, an increase of 9% over 1998. We were pleased with these results given the many failed nests early in the season. Equally important is the large number of previously banded adult birds that we were able to recapture. After all, unless we recapture adult birds, there is no point in banding nestlings.

This year we trapped 247adult birds, and increase of 68 percent over 1998. Thirty-five adult birds were found dead.

We put a lot of energy into recapturing adult birds so that we can answer critical questions about the life span, productivity and dispersal patterns of western bluebirds. This winter Marilynne Keyser is going to analyze the banding and nesting data we have accumulated over the years to help answer some of these questions. Hopefully, her work will result in some published articles to share our data with others in the bluebirding, banding and scientific communities.

Parasitism in our bluebirds

by Pat Johnston

You all know how difficult the weather was last spring, delaying the nesting of some birds, and causing havoc among birds that were attempting to raise their young.

A very unusual occurrence was the number of female bluebirds found dead on the nest, over eggs or dead nestlings. Usually, she would be seen the evening before, apparently healthy, or perhaps slightly lethargic with her feathers fluffed up. The next morning she would be found dead. Other birds were found dead on the ground near the nest. Ordinarily, this might happen once per nesting season, but this year there were eight to 10 cases.

We consulted with the Audubon Wildlife Care Center, and they put us in touch with Dr. Marli Lintner of the Avian Medical Center in Lake Oswego. Upon necropsy, several birds were found to have been infected with acanthocephalan endoparasites, or Thorny Headed Tapeworm.

The only literature on this problem was published in Sialia Vol. 2 No. 2, 1980, (the quarterly journal of the North American Bluebird Society) authored by our friend, Elsie Eltzroth, a very knowledgeable bird rehabilitator in Corvallis. According to Elsie's report, the only known intermediary of this tapeworm is the pillbug, an isopod common across the United States. Bluebirds eat pillbugs when the weather is cold and wet. This usually happens in

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Spring training session scheduled

The spring training session will be held on Saturday, February 12, 2000, atthe Visitors' Center at Champoeg State Heritage Area. New volunteers will meet from 9:00am to noon. Experienced monitors will meet from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. We strongly encourage all monitors to attend one of these sessions. There will be coffee and donuts available, as well as everything you will need for monitoring your nestboxes in 2000. Babysitting will be provided. If you know anyone who is interested in becoming a nestbox monitor, please tell them about our morning training session and let Pat, Marilynne or Brenda know so that we have enough materials to accomodate them. Any property owners who are monitoring their own nestboxes are welcome to attend one of the training sessions. Just let us know that you are coming. Call or email Marilynne at 694-2738 or mtkeyser@aol.com if you need directions to the park.

Champoeg Joins the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail

The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Program's bluebird trail at Champoeg State Heritage Area has been accepted as the first Oregon member of the TBT. In addition, to maintaining and monitoring the trail, we will be expected to participate in a coordinated research effort on a continent-wide basis.

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) has begun an effort to extend bluebird trails across Canada and the United States. The Transcontinental Bluebird Trail (TBT) will encompass privately managed bluebird trails, as well as trails established on publicly owned land. It will provide an opportunity for concerned citizens to support bluebird conservation efforts through an Adopt-A-Box program that will be publicized across the continent. Among the questions to be explored through information collected on the TBT are:

- Which nest box styles and hole shapes are most effective in attracting bluebirds and deterring competitors?
- What makes the most successful predator control?
- Do geographic differences exist for nest box preferences?
- What relationship exists between bluebird productivity and pairing of nestboxes?
- What trends surface from data on clutch size and number of broods?

The official kickoff for the TBT is scheduled for May 20, 2000. NABS will provide assistance with public relations, educational materials and media activities. The second annual Champoeg Bluebird Festival will be held the same day to take advantage of the highly visible international publicity.

The Adopt-A-Box sponsored trails need to be in public open spaces like parks and greenways to ensure public access for conservation education programs; however, any NABS member can officially register their privately managed bluebird trail on the TBT.

We urge all of you who are members of NABS to register your trails. If you aren't a member of NABS, this would be a great time to join. A regular membership costs just $15 per year, which includes a subscription to the quarterly journal Bluebird. To join, send your check to North American Bluebird Society, PO BOX 74, Darlington, WI 53530. For more information, check out the NABS website at www.nabluebirdsociety.org

Box #5

My bluebabies flue de coup
Nuttin here but hay and poop
I glad dey grue
I glad dey flue
But howscome now I feelin blue?

--C.J. Goudeau
from "bluebirds fly" CA PRP
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Parasites/

the early spring when fruits and berries are depleted and their preferred foods, spiders, grasshoppers and crickets, are not yet available.

There seems to be no treatment, because the bird is dead before a problem is recognized. As the weather warms, the pillbug is evidently not consumed in any quantity, it being a kind of emergency ration, so the problem subsides.

Next spring this will be something to be aware of. If it does occur, the nestbox should be cleaned out thoroughly. Dispose of the nest in a ziploc-type plastic bag, and place in your trash at home. Be sure to carry plastic gloves with you for such jobs. If you come upon a newly dead bird within 24-hours, put it in the same type of bag and refrigerate it right away. Contact your bander for possible necropsy. We are really indebted to Dr. Lintner for her assistance and necropsies, and to Elsie Eltzroth for her research and article.

NABS Convention 2000

The year 2000 NABS convention will be held in Galena, Illinois, northwest of Chicago, June 22-25.

The convention will be held at the Chestnut Mountain Resort on the shores of the Mississippi River. (If you would like a preview of the facilities, check out their website, www.chestnutmtn.com)

The keynote speakers will be Don and Lillian Stokes, authors of numerous birding field guides, including "The Bluebird Book."

Field trips will include birding, botanizing, history and geology, and a boat trip on the Mississippi, and families are welcome!

Call Brenda McGowan, 625-6786 or Pat Johnston, 246-1337, if you are interested in attending or need more details.

Bluebirds nest at the Oregon Golf Club

By David Phipps

The Oregon Golf Club is pleased to announce its first successful nesting of the western bluebird. In 1999, three pair of bluebirds were sighted around some of the club's 26 nest-boxes. One pair nested successfully, producing five offspring. The female had been banded and was from Peavys in Newberg. The male had not been banded. With the additional sightings in the area we are hoping for even more success next year.

The remaining boxes did quite well this year with other cavity nesters. A total of 34 violet- green swallows and 73 tree swallows fledged. Also five kestrels fledged from one of two boxes.

We were able to talk the local newspaper, The West Linn Tidings, into doing a story on the bluebirds at the Oregon Golf Club. In recent years the area around the Oregon Golf Club, known as Pete's Mountain, has seen a tremendous amount of development, with this comes destruction of natural habitat. We hope that the article will encourage the landowners to preserve snags and associated habitat where possible, or contact the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project and allow nesting boxes to be placed on their property.

We are very excited about the bluebird success at the golf course this year and would be happy to host a birding tour for anyone interested. The Magpies, a birding club from the Audubon Society of Portland, already has visited the site. To plan a tour or for more information, please contact Russell Vandehey or David Phipps at 655-4533.

First Annual Champoeg Bluebird Festival a Great Success

The Champoeg Bluebird Festival held on June 19 drew more than 200 people during the five hours of the event. Festival-goers listened to slide-show presentations, toured the visitor's center's new display on the western bluebird, attended field trips to see nesting bluebirds in the park and more than 30 families took home bluebird nest boxes after participating in nest-box building workshops. Time was spent educating each family who built a box about how to attract bluebirds while discouraging house sparrows. Nest-box building and field trips seemed to be the most popular aspects of the festival.

We're already in the planning stages for next year's festival. If anyone would like to participate in planning the event or volunteering his or her time during the event, please call Shelly Walker at 590-4927 or Marilynne Keyser at 694-2738.

Autumn bluebirds

It's fall again, time to start thinking about pumpkins and eggnog, trees changing color, maybe even Thanksgiving and Christmas, anything but bluebirds. We've already cleaned out our boxes, weatherproofed them until spring and put away our gear. Like the bluebird, our nesting season is over, too.

Or so I thought until last the last week in October when one of my dedicated landowners, Victor Wendte, called to let me know he had just seen seven banded bluebirds on his clothesline. They were checking out the nestbox near his front door. Could this be an omen for spring? I'd like to think so.

Judging by their number and interest in that particular box these are probably the same bluebirds (with their young) that nested here in August. This pair seems very devoted to this nest site. Not only were they around when we cleaned out the box, but they and their young were spotted by Victor once in September and again on October 20th. Since these adults seem so attached to this area, I am curious to discover if they are only interested in a place to wait out the cold, harsh winter , or are they already contemplating the warmth of spring and a prime location to raise another family?

—Joanna M. Linsley

BLUEBLURBS....

Gail Bolstad's "Super Female"

On June 22, 1999, I met monitor Gail Bolstad in Sherwood to band nestlings in a nestbox on her own property on Westfall Rd. After banding the four nestlings, I captured the previously banded adult female in a potter trap. Her band number (1511-37587) told me lots about her. She was four years old, having been banded in June 1995 at a nest box on a power pole at the corner of Tooze Rd. and McConnell Rd., about one mile from Gail's property. Her mate, who was also banded, was five years old. We were excited at the discovery because most bluebirds don't live as long as these two old-timers.

Even more exciting was the discovery that our "super female" was the same one that had nested successfully on Gail's property in 1996, 1997 and 1998. In the four years she has nested, she has produced a total of 31 fledged young! Over the years, we have recaptured at least 8 of her offspring (6 males and 2 females) presiding over their own broods, some nesting on Gail's property and others nesting within a radius of a mile or two.

With this kind of productivity, Gail's "super female" is making a generous contribution to the recovery of the bluebird population in Sherwood! —Marilynne Keyser

Don't Forget about our Website! Log onto www.pacifier.com/~bluebird and see it all! And don't forget to contribute your great photos and bluebird expertise to this site - it belongs to all of us!

To subscribe to the NABS listserver and keep up on all the national news having to do with bluebird conservation, send an e-mail to: **listproc@cornell.edu** that contains this single line in the text field of your message: SUBSCRIBE BLUEBIRD-L your name

The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project is a non-profit 501 C(3) organization run entirely by volunteers. Expenses include the costs of printing and mailing the newsletter and other educational materials, training volunteers, and purchasing lumber and other materials for building and mounting nestboxes. We also purchase mealworms which are sold at cost to property owners. Since we require no dues to belong to our organization, your tax-deductible contribution is essential to our continued success. Please send your contributions to PO Box 1469, Sherwood, OR 97140. Our tax identifcation number is 93-1021520.

The Prescott project would like to thank the following people and businesses for contributing much-needed building materials for nestbox-building. These activites, which are spearheaded by volunteer Dan Brown require an incredible amount of time and effort. We are grateful to everyone here who helped the bluebirds in 1999!

Alan and Deanna Chavez of Chavez Lumber
Ed McGrath of Marine Lumber
Great Northern Wood Products
Ken Catt of Newberg Lumbermen
Jack Stennet
Cliff Beaman
John Wooden
Louis Gay
Champoeg State Heritage Area
Dennis Streed
Jeff Wiese
Charlie Stalzer

In addition to two generous contributions from anonymous donors, Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project received gifts of $50 or more from the following supporters:

Gail Bolstad
Eloise Binns
Renee Mason
Lauri and Ron Kunzman
Jim Bisenius
Jill and Fred Newton
Jean and Ray Auel
Carol Santesson
Mr. and Mrs. Harold Sodrow
John Thomas and Pam Reid
Stephan Edwards
Colleen and Stan Freidberg
Dan Sherman
Geof Beasley
Roger Hirsch
The Wild Bird Nest
Customers of The Backyard Bird Shop

Bluebirds in Estacada

After three years of raising swallows in approximately 30 nestboxes in the region around Estacada and McIver State Park, we were finally rewarded with the sight of six blue eggs in a box at the corner of Divers and Porter roads on July 5. On July 16, Marilynne Keyser banded six healthy nestling bluebirds. The bad news was that the female bird was apparently the victim of a road accident. Realizing that it would be a big job for the male bird to feed six young ones, Marilynne relocated two of the nestlings to nestboxes on the west side. Thanks to the heroic efforts of teenagers Brenda and Jason Zook, who live nearby, and the surprising appearance of a second male bluebird, the four remaining youngsters at this site survived and fledged on July 22. Brenda and Jason warmed the nest with hand-warmers, hand-fed the nestlings for several days, and then continued to provide mealworms to the two male bluebirds until fledging time. Many thanks for your fine work, Jason and Brenda! We now have nine nestboxes in this neighborhood and are looking forward to an even more exciting season in the year 2000.

—Carl and Joan Christian

"Albino" bluebirds sighted in Maryland

Finding one white bluebird would be rare, say bluebird experts. But finding two together would be astronomical.

The chances of finding two albino bluebirds in the wild are a billion to one, according to John Bianci of the National Audubon Society's office in New York. Nevertheless, that is just what happened to Don Unger, who discovered the pair on a farm just outside of Westminster, Maryland.

Actually, the birds are not technically albinos they are leucistic. Albinos lack any pigment, which gives the eyes a pinkish-hue caused by the light reflecting off blood vessels in the eyes. Leucism is a little understood genetic mutation in which animals have pigment in the eyes, but not the skin. The Westminster pair are pure white with black or dark brown eyes and dark-colored legs.

Unger reportedly has seen the two white birds associating with a small flock of normal-colored bluebirds. They look and act just like the others, he says, and are believed to be part of a brood of juveniles, with whom the leucistic pair have been making frequent visits to the farm.

The October 9 issue of the *Carroll County Times* of Westminster featured a front-page article about the leucistic bluebirds along with some striking pictures. It will be interesting to see if these birds survive the winter and are able to raise broods next season.

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Spotlight on cavity-nesters
Violet-green swallow

The Violet-green swallow is a neotropical migrant breeding west of the Rockies and wintering from southern Mexico and southward. Compared to its close relative, the tree swallow, little is known about its biology.

The parts of the west, California in particular, the violet-green is not as common as other swallows and has experienced population declines – in some places significant declines – in the past several decades. This could be a result of the violet-green being primarily an insectivore (insects comprise 99-percent of their diet). Cold weather could put them at the mercy of the elements when many insects go dormant. Also, competition for nestboxes must play a role in their decline.

Violet-green's can be found in the same areas as tree swallows, but can be told from other swallows by their white rump-patch in flight, which extends almost to the middle of the back. However, if both species are in the area, it may be difficult to tell juveniles apart because the white marks over the eyes of young violet-green's are not obvious when they are young. Even second-year birds are difficult to separate by facial markings alone.

Nestlings can be told apart when they are 10-14 days old chiefly by facial markings. The violet-green chick has light-gray to white upper-eyelids; the tree swallow's eyelids are the same sooty gray-brown as the top of its head. One caveat: by the time they are ready to fledge, violet-green's eyelids may no longer be noticeably lighter that the rest of its face.

Like tree-swallows, the violet-greens lay four to six white or pale pink eggs in a nest of stems, twigs, dry grass, fur or horsehair. Egg-laying may begin before feather-gathering commences. The male brings in the feather adornment to the nest.

The female will begin incubating before the clutch is complete. As a result, hatching is asynchronous, that is, the chicks may pip from the eggs one by one over a period of five days. Incubation takes 13-15 days. The chicks' eyes open at 10-11 days. They are in the nest a total of 23-25 days.

Unless something happens to the first clutch, there usually is not a second brood. There is no information on how long juveniles depend on adult support.

The male develops a less pronounced brood-patch that the female but still sits on the eggs while the female is out feeding. Females, according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, have extreme nest-site fidelity – returning to the same spot about 80% of the time. Whether males have such site fidelity is unknown. It also is unknown how juveniles disperse (here's yet another project for banders!)

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