



Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter – FALL 2003

An affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

Western Bluebirds Staged a Comeback in 2003

Our population of bluebirds appears to be making a comeback. Nesting attempts showed an increase of 23%, and there was a 33% increase in fledged young. On average, of five eggs laid, three nestlings successfully left the nest in 2003. There was a marked decrease in the number of adult birds found dead suggesting the epidemic that plagued them may be over. More parent bluebirds survived in 2003 to ensure the survival of their offspring.

The number of nest boxes available for use has remained roughly the same over the past three years, so the increase in nesting attempts is due to a greater bluebird utilization rate. There are some areas where bluebirds use 50% of available boxes and some where they use as few as 10%.

We still have a way to go to meet the record results we experienced in 2001, but we are well on our way.

	2001	2002	2003
Nesting Attempts	591	450	554
Percent Successful	74%	70%	72%
Young Fledged	1,715	1,232	1,639
Fledged per Attempt	2.9	2.7	3.0
Adults Found Dead	53	94	28
Available Nest Boxes	1,725	1,780	1,743
Attempts as % of Available Nest Boxes	34%	25%	32%
Number of Monitors	92	88	85



Season's Greetings from PBRP!

Surviving: With a Little Help from Our Friends

By Corinne Stefanick

Early this spring I received an urgent call from the Winkelmanns on Cooper Mountain, one of the original locations where Hubert Prescott placed nesting boxes years ago: An injured bluebird had been spotted in the yard. I contacted the monitor, Sue Carr, who followed up right away to discover an adult male bluebird on the ground with a damaged wing. Realizing that he was unable to fly and would not survive, she took him to the Audubon Society of Portland's Wildlife Care Center on Cornell Road.

Thanks to Sue and another Prescott monitor, Kathy Anderson, who both volunteer weekly at the center, I was able to keep up with the patient's progress. Bob Sallinger, Care Center Director, set the broken wing and confined him until he showed signs of recovery. It was touch-and-go for some time, but eventually our injured bluebird was transferred to a licensed rehabilitator where he progressed sufficiently to be released.

When Pat Johnston returned to the Winkleman property with the survivor, she saw the female

Surviving... (continued from page 1)



Photo by Jane Dunkin

He is not camera shy, but very suspicious.

perched nearby with a new mate and found two eggs in the nest box. When she released the rehabilitated bird, the female immediately flew down to greet him, but her new partner was not as welcoming. He flew at the intruder and both fell to the ground. Every time the female started toward him, the new male dove at her, obviously upset with her interest in her first partner. This behavior continued for some time until the released male retreated to a tree 100 feet away. I followed this unfolding story via email through the spring, and we all wondered if the returning male would move to a new territory.

Finally around the beginning of July I heard from Sue Carr that two males were attending the same nest box with the female. They apparently decided to make a truce and tolerated each other long enough to successfully raise the young.

We would like to thank our friends, the staff and volunteers at Audubon's Wildlife Care Center, for providing expert care to our injured bird. The center is licensed by both the state and federal governments to care for native species of all kinds. It operates 365 days a year and supports one of the country's largest raptor rehabilitation centers. In 2002 the staff treated 142 different species including otter, beaver, porcupine, fox, black bear, turtles and several endangered peregrine falcons.

The Audubon Society recently announced an expanded program, the Urban Wildlife Resource Office that offers workshops, field trips, brochures, and one-on-one advice about wildlife in urban settings. Lead by Karen Munday, an Audubon urban wildlife specialist, the new effort is designed to help property owners understand and deal with wildlife in their own

backyards. As government agencies have scaled back their wildlife management roles, demand for this type of help has grown.

If you have questions or concerns about wild animals in your neighborhood, call the resource office at 503.292.6855 or check www.audubonportland.org. They are there to help us enjoy our wild world. 🌿



Many thanks to Phil and Scott Garstka, owners of the Phillips Pump Company of Sherwood, for their generous donation of metal pipe for use in making posts for mounting nest boxes.



The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project is a non-profit 501C(3), all-volunteer organization dedicated to the recovery, restoration, and enhancement of the western bluebird in the northern Willamette Valley of Oregon.

**Please send all tax-deductible donations to:
PBRP, P.O. Box 1469, Sherwood, OR 97140.
Our tax identification number is 93-1021520.**

The PBRP Newsletter is available free by mail each spring and fall. To receive it, call 503.245.8449 and leave your name and address or read it online at www.prescottbluebird.com.

Many thanks to Marc Kline at the UPS Store in Newberg for free copy services.

PBRP Steering Committee Members

- Corinne Stefanick, President
- Fred Robinson, Past President
- Pat Johnston, Founding Member
- Brenda McGowan, Founding Member
- Karen Sharples, Treasurer
- Marilyn Van Dyk, Secretary
- Jane Dunkin, Newsletter Editor
- Jim Conroy, Finance Coordinator
- Amber Keyser, Research Coord., Master Bander
- Marilynne Keyser, Database Coordinator
- Lauri Kunzman, PR Coordinator
- Kit Whittaker, Events Coordinator
- Gayle Mirkin, Speakers/Presentations Coordinator
- Charlie Stalzer, Web Master

Bluebird 101

By Dan Sherman

“Yesterday was much more dramatic than I’d anticipated”... was the opening line of an email I received from Carole Hallett on June 25.

Upon arriving for a routine banding she found five adult bluebirds (two male, three female) trying to fend off a pair of house sparrows that were attempting to commandeer the nest box. Of the five nestlings, one had been mortally wounded, and two others were injured. She banded the surviving young and put them back in the box, then caught and banded one of the two males. The sparrows did not return.

After placing some foster bluebird young in another box, she returned to find that the sparrows were back. She removed the young and took them to Portland Audubon’s Wildlife Care Center, where two of the four chicks died. The surviving two were transferred to a rehabilitator, who raised them until they were ready to fledge.

By July 26 they were ready. Pat Johnston advised me to return them to the place where they had hatched providing I knew there were bluebirds in the area. If no bluebirds were known to be there, she recommended I choose a site where young had recently fledged. I decided to release them at a double-clutch box.

The first clutch had fledged in early June, and the second was only a few days from fledging. The juveniles were still around, and I hoped they would make good “Bluebird 101” instructors.

When I arrived I spotted an adult male and what I suspected were also bluebirds in a group of trees. I wanted to take a quick photo of one of the survivors before releasing it. After adjusting my camera, I reached into the box and took out a nestling to find myself being dive-bombed by as many as five bluebirds.

I consider that an excellent sign that the little survivors will benefit from experienced teachers and complete their required “Bluebird 101” course. They are wearing bands, and I hope someday someone will recapture one and confirm they made it. 🦋



This youngster finds nest box building fascinating.

Bluebird Festival Flies Again

Mark your calendar! Our Bluebird Festival is taking flight once again! Friends of Prescott will host the event this year at Champoeg State Park on Saturday, June 19, Father's Day weekend.

The festival is still in the planning stage, and event coordinator, Kit Whittaker, is looking for a small but excited core of volunteers to help make the 2004 Champoeg Bluebird Festival as fun and successful as it has been in the past.

Some of the anticipated activities include a blueberry pancake breakfast, artisan booths with bluebird goods, nest box building, and of course the opportunity to view and learn about bluebirds in their home environment. We need a coordinator and several volunteer helpers for each of these activities.

If you are interested in being part of this event, please contact Kit at 503.682.1446 or email her at whittsend@aol.com. 🦋

[New! PBRPVols@yahoogroups.com](mailto:PBRPVols@yahoogroups.com)

Now you can keep in touch, share your bluebird experiences on the trail or from your own backyard with our new online group. For full access you may need to sign up with *Yahoo*. Follow the online prompts to complete your membership. For assistance, please contact us by email at email@prescottbluebird.com. See you online!

West Nile Virus: Fragmentation & the Brown-Headed Cowbird

by Laura Spinney, BioMedNet, www.bmn.com

United States researchers have found that the mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus (WNV) to birds are quite particular about the species they feed on. One of their favorites, the brown-headed cowbird, happens to be increasing in numbers and pushing westward as a result of the fragmentation of its habitat by humans. We might be driving new epidemics toward ourselves.

The primary hosts of WNV are birds. Mosquitoes that normally feed only on birds maintain a cycle of infection within them, and the virus only breaks out of that cycle to infect other species when bridge vectors (mosquitoes that bite both humans and birds) come into contact with an infected bird.

For that reason, the degree of contact between bird and mosquito (or horse and mosquito in the case of another, far more vicious neurological disease called Eastern Equine Encephalomyelitis, or EEE) is thought to be a major determining factor in whether the virus crosses the species barrier. When contact is high, the virus amplifies itself more quickly, and there is a higher chance that the bridge vector will come into contact with it.

To investigate how the degree of contact affects viral levels, and hence the risk of infection for humans, Thomas Unnasch PhD, a Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and colleagues analyzed the stomach contents of bird-biting mosquitoes in three US states: New Jersey, New York and Tennessee. They presented their findings at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Savannah, Georgia in August. They used a reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction to detect the presence of WNV and another sensitive assay to determine the species of origin of the mosquitoes' blood meals.

At all the test sites, they found that of the 24 bird species the mosquitoes fed on, three accounted for more than 50% of the blood they had

ingested. Of these, the most notable was the brown-headed cowbird.

Similarly, in Tuskagee National Forest in Alabama (which saw an epidemic of EEE in 2001) in the first year of the study the mosquitoes favored two species: the American robin and the brown-headed cowbird, with the cowbird accounting for more than 40% of their blood meals.

The American crow seemed not to be to the mosquitoes' liking at any of the sites, although American crows are regarded as sentinels for the arrival of WNV because they are highly susceptible and die off quickly once infected.

In both the EEE and WNV studies the researchers were surprised to find that the birds the mosquitoes preferred to bite were not endemic to the swamps they themselves inhabited. The birds' usual habitats were grasslands or higher altitude ecosystems.

According to Unnasch that suggests the mosquitoes' habitat could be larger than was previously thought, and they might forage outside swamp areas before returning to them to digest their meals and lay their eggs. At the same time, forest clearance could be enabling grassland-dwelling cowbirds to stray closer to mosquito-ridden areas. "What we are seeing is a consistent pattern of these arboviral vectors targeting just a very few species," he says.

His team also found that in July and August a higher proportion of the mosquitoes' blood meals came from hosts other than birds. Before that July drop-off, however, birds were their main targets. Unnasch thinks that the mosquitoes might be zeroing in on fledglings of certain species.

He suggests that young birds are a dead-end population, because they are virally naïve. They die quickly and provide no reservoir for transmission to other birds or humans. However, fledglings abound early in the season and transmission generally peaks in late summer, he says. Further research is needed to explain the delayed, late summer peak.

"This to me is really interesting because of the

West Nile... (continued from page 4)

increases we have seen in brown-headed cowbirds with the fragmentation of the landscape," said Sharon Collinge of the Department of Environmental, Population and Organismic Biology and the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Colorado, Boulder. "They've moved westwards and they tend to forage more around forest edges." 🍃

Prescott Welcomes New Banders

In 2003, **Carol Munger** and **Polly Stady** joined the ranks of Prescott banders. **Marilyn van Dyk** was a bander-in-training and will assume her own banding responsibilities in 2004. We are also fortunate to have two new banders-in-training for next year—**Jan Dougall** and **Bunny Hirtzel**. With the new banders there will be a shifting of bluebird routes to better equalize the workload. This may mean some monitors and landowners may see a new face when banding time comes. Please help us welcome our new banders! 🍃

2003 All Wrapped Up, 2004 Ahead

by Corinne Stefanick

Forty-three Prescott volunteers gathered September 20 at Champoeg Park for the annual fall wrap-up meeting. We shared stories from the 2003 breeding season, heard updates from steering committee members, and elected a new president, secretary, and treasurer for two-year terms. The meeting provided an ideal opportunity for monitors and banders to learn new techniques for improving field practices.

I'm pleased to have been elected president and look forward to working with all of you over the next two years. After working as a monitor for four years and a licensed bander for three, I am impressed with the enthusiasm you all bring to the project, and I thank you for your dedication.

Please join me in welcoming to the steering committee Marilyn van Dyk, our newly elected secretary, and Karen Sharples, our new treasurer. Marilyn monitored a route for three

years and completed bander training this year, and Karen became a monitor this year. We're fortunate to have them as new officers.

I'm also pleased to introduce two volunteers who have assumed non-elected positions on the steering committee: Jane Dunkin, newsletter editor, and Kit Whittaker, events coordinator. Jane has extensive writing and computer skills, monitored a route for two years, and takes over the newsletter with this issue. Kit Whittaker also is a monitor who worked on events in the past and volunteered to take over event coordination in the future. These are two vital steering committee roles that provide key outreach and education opportunities for the project. We are fortunate to have these skilled volunteers on board.

In 2004 we will present our spring training on February 28 at Champoeg Park visitor's center (see page 8). Please mark your calendar now. We are also resuming the Champoeg Bluebird Festival among other outreach opportunities, so watch the spring newsletter for more details.

With the help of our talented web site guru, Charlie Stalzer, we are expanding our web presence at www.prescottbluebird.com to include significant historical information in an online archive. We have a rich legacy to share that goes back to the earliest days of Hubert Prescott's pioneering work thanks to careful preservation of valuable documents by Pat Johnston and other long-time volunteers. I am excited to see what Charlie has in store for us. We also plan to expand the volunteer recruitment web pages, provide online access to reporting forms and other documentation for current volunteers, and upload more pictures. Any other ideas you have to make the site more useful, please let us know. 🍃

Sparrow Trouble? Try Feathers

Can't trap those pesky sparrows? Try white feathers. It seems they cannot resist going after their precious nest materials. Scatter some on the ground, then stand back and watch. They are most likely going to collect them up and go right back into the box – for the last time. Good luck!

(Keith Kridler – NABS Summer 2003)

Bluebird Behavior: Observe and Learn

When monitoring nest boxes, take the time to observe bluebird activities to determine where they are in their nesting cycle:

Nesting Phase	Behavior
Box selection	Both birds perch on the box, male sings on or near the box. Both go in and out repeatedly.
Nest building	The female goes into the box frequently over a few days with nest material in her beak.
Egg laying	Not much activity around the box, sometimes mating nearby. Female enters the box for short periods. Male is rarely seen entering or near the box.
Post egg laying	Incubation begins, female is in the box for longer periods depending on the weather and food availability. She stays inside and peeks out, while the male may bring food. Otherwise the male may be nearby, standing guard. Female spends the night in the box.
Hatching and caring for hatchlings	Female is in the box for long periods except when feeding herself and the hatchlings. Male is nearby and visits more often to bring insects. Both adults enter to feed the tiny hatchlings.
Caring for nestlings	Adults visit the box frequently, feed larger insects through the opening and enter the box to remove fecal sacs.
Preparing to fledge	Nestlings look out the opening a few days before fledging, an important signal to the observer <i>not to open the box or go near it for fear of causing premature fledging.</i>
Fledging	Adults fly to and from the box, call from perches nearby, and encourage nestlings to fledge. Nestlings peak out and chirp loudly.
Caring for fledglings	Adults and young travel together, feeding, learning survival skills, and growing stronger.
Nest failure or severe stress	Adult birds fly to and from the box obviously upset, but do not enter the box, or adult birds are not present at all. Possibly indicators of predation, nestling death due to hypothermia, or adult bird deaths.

Note: This article is based on one that appeared in the spring 2003 *Bluebird Trails and Tales*, the newsletter of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania.

Volunteer Positions Open

In addition to needing nest box monitors and banders, PBRP has the following types of volunteer positions available. If you are interested in finding out more about any of them, please call the hotline and leave your contact information, drop us a note at email@prescottbluebird.com or send in the coupon on page 8.

Nest Box Builder – Constructs nest boxes and kits based on existing plans, tracks current inventory, and works with other builders to maintain supplies. PBRP provides tools and has several generous providers who donate raw materials. This activity can take up to several hours. This year, we'll need a team onsite at the Champoeg Bluebird Festival in June (see article on page 4).

Email Monitor – Monitors PBRP's Yahoo account, replies to inquiries, forwards messages to other volunteers as appropriate, and deletes spam to maintain the account. During busy times leading up to training or events, we recommend checking every other day. This activity can take up to one hour at each sign-on.

Voicemail Monitor – Dials into our hotline account, checks all voicemail messages, takes notes, replies to callers' questions/inquiries, and forwards requests to other volunteers as appropriate. Similar to the email checker, this activity may require as much as an hour every day during busy times.

Nest Box Guide – Assists at the Champoeg Bluebird Festival to guide small groups to the nesting birds in the park and explain to them what the bluebirds are doing during the breeding season. This volunteer may be asked to guide field trips for small groups visiting Champoeg in the summer months.

Program Presenter – Presents to community groups, school classes, and civic organizations using our slide program, equipment, and exhibit materials. There is currently an active group of presenters, and we wish to expand this educational aspect of our program. Each presentation may last about two hours.

2004 Critical Dates and Activities

Banders' Meeting	Saturday, January 10
Spring Training Day	Saturday, February 28
Breeding season begins	March-April
Newsletter deadline	April 1
Champoeg Festival	Saturday, June 19
Fall Wrap-up Meeting	Saturday, September 18
Newsletter deadline	November 1

Do You Want to be a Bander?

Have you had the opportunity to be present when your bander has banded nestlings in one of the nest boxes you monitor? Have you held one of the tiny chicks in your hand? Have you experienced the pleasure of finding out that the adult birds at the nest box are the same pair from the prior year? Or that the female at the nest box traveled 12 miles from her natal box? Maybe when your bander checked the band on a recaptured male at the nest box, you have found that he was six years old? If you haven't had these experiences, would you like to?

If you have at least one year of experience as a nest box monitor and more time to commit to PBRP, you might want to become a bander-in-training in 2004. As a bander-in-training, you would accompany a licensed bander and learn how to handle birds, how to trap birds and how to band birds. If the licensed bander believes that you would make a good bander, you would be assigned your own routes to band in 2005.

Although you may start out banding only your own route, you will be expected to band at least three or four routes as you gain experience. That means supervising the work of the monitors on those routes, keeping in regular contact with them, helping them with problems in the field and making sure all of the nests on their routes are banded and as many adults as possible are recaptured. It is a lot of work, but the rewards are wonderful.

If you are interested in becoming a bander-in-training, please contact your own bander or call our master bander, Amber Keyser, at 503.293.3290. 📧

Do You want to be a Monitor?

If you would relish the opportunity to keep an eye on the nests of Western Bluebirds, the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project needs you! If you are willing to drive a fair number of miles and commit three to four hours a week from early April until late August, you can join a group of dedicated volunteers who are helping save this vulnerable species.

To become a bluebird monitor, you need to attend the monitor training session at Champoeg State Heritage Area on Saturday, February 28, 2004. The session from 9:00 am to noon will focus on the skills you need to be a bluebird nest box monitor. Not only will you learn about bluebirds and what you can do to help them, but you will receive a notebook of materials to assist you. You will also meet the licensed bird bander who will provide on-the-job training as the breeding season develops. (For agenda and directions to Champoeg see page 8.)

Because we have limited space available for the training session, you must pre-register by calling our recorded line (503-245-8449). Indicate that you are interested in the spring training session and leave your name and phone number. One of our banders will call you back to discuss available nest box routes and answer your questions. We will make every effort to assign you to a route and a bander prior to the training session. **YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER.** If all available nest box routes are assigned during the pre-registration process, we may not be able to accommodate those who show up at the training without pre-registering. 📧



**PBRP Spring Training
Champoeg State Heritage Area
Visitor's Center
February 28, 2004
9:00AM - 3:00PM**

Agenda

**New volunteers please remember to
PRE-REGISTER! (see page 7)**

AM Session: New Monitors

- 9:00-9:10 Welcome and Introductions
- 9:10-9:30 Getting to Know the Western
Bluebird—a Slide Presentation
- 9:30-10:15 What Monitors Do—a Typical
Breeding Cycle
- 10:15-10:30 Break—Donuts and Coffee
- 10:30-10:45 What Every Monitor Needs—
Nest Boxes, Poles and Toolkit
- 10:45-11:00 What Bird is That?—Identifying
Competitors, Nests and Eggs
- 11:00-11:10 Protecting Birds—Banding,
Research and the Law
- 11:10-11:15 Upcoming Prescott Events
- 11:15-11:45 Finding Answers to Your
Questions in the Field
- 11:45-12:00 Meet with Your Bander

Directions to Champoeg State Heritage Area:
1) Take Hwy 219 south from Newberg. After crossing the Willamette River, take the first road on the left (Champoeg Road) and follow it about six miles to the park. 2) Take I-5 north or south to Exit 278 (Donald/Aurora) and follow signed county roads about six miles west to Champoeg Park. You will need to purchase a \$3.00 entry pass at the Visitor's Center.

PM Session: Veteran Monitors

- 1:00-1:10 Welcome and Introductions
- 1:10-1:20 New “History of Prescott”
CD-Rom
- 1:20-1:30 Update on Prescott Website and
Listservs
- 1:30-1:45 Sparrow Management
- 1:45-2:00 Swallow Competition
- 2:00-2:30 Research Results for 2003 and
Plans for 2004
- 2:30-2:45 Prescott Events for 2004
- 2:45-3:00 Questions, Comments and
Wrap-up

Note: Banders are to attend both sessions.



Yes! I want to help the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project!

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of

___ \$10 ___ \$25
___ \$50 ___ \$100 Other: _____

Mail to:
PBRP
PO Box 1469
Sherwood OR 97140



I cannot contribute right now, but I am interested in

- having a nest box placed on my property
- volunteer opportunities
- other: _____

Name: _____ Email: _____

Phone: _____ Best time to call: _____