



Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter

What's New with Bluebird Research?

Prescott GPS Project

We are studying how bluebirds use different habitats, how they move between habitats, and how habitat influences bluebird success. We monitor over 1800 nest boxes in five counties. Bluebird success depends on identifying the best, most productive places to locate boxes. To do this, we have initiated an exciting project. Thanks to a grant from the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation, we purchased three Global Positioning System (GPS) units and assembled a great team of volunteers to use them.

A GPS unit is a small device similar to a cell phone that communicates with satellites in space. Through this link, the GPS determines its exact location by longitude and latitude readings. Our volunteers will accompany monitors on their routes this summer and take a GPS reading for every nest box. Once this information is downloaded into a computer and linked to habitat information and bluebird breeding records, we'll identify places that are good for bluebird survival and nesting success.

If you are a monitor, expect a call from one of our GPS volunteers sometime this summer. This should be a fun and informative project for all of us, and best of all, it should give the bluebirds an extra helping hand. 🍀



Many Thanks to Prescott Volunteers

The Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project is fortunate to have a great new group of volunteer monitors starting this season. We attracted a large number of prospects to the February 22 training session thanks to effective planning and careful follow through by steering committee members Lauri Kunzman, Marilynne Keyser, and Dave Flaming.

We provided volunteers with a new training program designed and presented by Dave Flaming and his subcommittee and a training-reference manual developed by Amber Keyser and Corinne Stefanick. Most of them are now actively monitoring bluebird routes in our target areas. Their training continues throughout the season under the supervision of licensed banders who assist them as questions and problems arise. Those volunteers to whom we were unable to assign routes have generously agreed to help in other ways (see related story on page 3).

Nest box monitors are at the heart of the Prescott's bluebird recovery effort because they check approximately 1800 nest boxes weekly, observe activity, and report valuable data for our growing database.

Many thanks to all of our volunteers — both new recruits and the numerous veterans who have worked with us for years — for the countless hours they spend in the field helping to save this precious species. If you are interested in reviewing our monitoring materials and guidelines, the new *Monitor Training Manual* and other informative material are available online at the Prescott web site. Click on the monitoring link at the left side of the home page. 🍀

Seeking Nominations for Steering Committee Offices

Fred Robinson, President

Nominations are now being solicited for candidates to fill the three offices of Prescott's steering committee. The two-year terms for president, treasurer, and secretary start this September when current officers have the option of stepping down or running again.

Past President Pat Johnston has graciously agreed to head up a nominating committee. If you wish to nominate someone or are interested in volunteering for an office, please contact Pat at p_joh@msn.com or call our message line, 503.245.8449 and someone will call you back.

The current steering committee meets August 26 at Champoeg Park when all nominations will be received. The election occurs September 20 at the wrap-up meeting with all volunteers present voting (see related article on page 4). 🍀

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 Tina Burdsall of Kinko's for the generous discount of copying services.

PBRP Steering Committee Members

Fred Robinson, President
Pat Johnston, Past President
Brenda McGowan, Treasurer
Corinne Stefanick, Secretary
Open position, Newsletter Editor
Open position, Nest Box Coordinator
Jim Conroy, Finance Coordinator
Dave Flaming, Voice of Prescott
Amber Keyser, Research Coor., Master Bander
Marilynne Keyser, Database Coordinator
Lauri Kunzman, PR Coordinator
Gayle Mirkin, Speakers/Presentations Coordinator
Charlie Stalzer, Web Master

How I Was Recruited as a Bluebird Monitor

Georgie Nelson, Monitor

Three plus years ago, I was working as the site supervisor at Dammasch State Hospital in Wilsonville while the site was under the control of the Oregon Department of Corrections. A dead bluebird with a band on its leg was found and given to me. I phoned the Audubon Society of Portland and gave them the band number.

Several weeks later a lady phoned saying she wanted to come out and investigate the scene of death. The next day she arrived, introduced herself as Marilynne Keyser, took one look around, and said, "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy. Where have you been all my bluebird life? This is number one prime bluebird habitat, and this is what we would like to do. And, oh yes, who are you and what is your name?"

I said my name is Georgie and I was in charge of the site and the inmate work crews. I could see the wheels turning. She was thinking, "Inmates, potential work force, boxes, poles, and this dude is a pushover—all I gotta do is get permission to put up boxes." So the next thing I was doing was cutting metal poles in the machine shop to put the boxes on.

I had to be offsite the scheduled day of putting up the boxes, but word has it that Marilynne met the inmate bus, and as they piled out in mass, she said, "OK boys, here is what were going to do." Then off went Marilynne followed by the inmates, poles, boxes and the prison guard to put up 13 bluebird nest boxes. It must have been quite a sight.

Marilynne taught me how to care for cold babies, feed them by hand, blow warm air on them, or take them out and warm them up in the pickup. What I know about bluebirds I owe to her.

I have been watching over the boxes ever since, but housing construction is scheduled to start on the site in 2003. I hope that the resident birds can stay in the hood, but it's a prime example of habitat loss. 🍀

Relief Monitors Now Available

We had an outstanding turnout at our spring training session. There were so many new volunteers we couldn't immediately use all of them on established routes. Several volunteered for the GPS project and others agreed to be "on-call" to cover routes temporarily for monitors out of town. This is the first time we have had a pool of relief monitors.

Active monitors who plan to be away must plan ahead and make arrangements to train a relief monitor. We suggest the following:

1. Monitors contact their banders to report when they expect to be out of town.
2. Monitors and banders assess the need and determine exactly what the relief monitor is to do, e.g., check all boxes, check only active bluebird nests, provide mealworms.
3. Monitors or banders may contact the relief monitors directly to ask for their help or they can email or call Marilynne Keyser and ask for a relief monitor at mtkeyser@aol.com or 541.923.0558. 🐦

Many Thanks to Dr. Pam Burke

Prescott extends a special thank you to Pam Burke, DVM. Otherwise known as the Bird Doctor, Pam is an avian vet who generously donated her time and expert services last summer to perform necropsies on eight dead adult bluebirds. Pam also trained Amber Keyser to do a modified necropsy. We are grateful to Dr. Burke for her important contribution to bluebird conservation. 🐦

Bluebird Gifts Available Online

Long-term monitors, Michael Poe and Joanna Linsley Poe have retired from active work with Prescott to devote their energies to building an online business, www.cafeshops.com/birdtracks. They have a variety of high-quality bluebird gift items, T-shirts, etc., available.

We appreciate their careful monitoring over several years, are sorry to lose their dedication, and wish them great success in this endeavor. 🐦

Volunteers Still Needed

If you are interested in any of the following open volunteer positions, please call 503.245.8449 and leave your name and number and what you might be interested in doing.

Newsletter Editor

This newsletter is produced each spring and fall. Most articles are written by other Prescott volunteers and provided to the editor via email. The editor needs access to email and good communication, writing, and MS Word skills.

Volunteer Coordinator

If you are a well-organized, computer-friendly, people-person with communication skills, we need you to work with our steering committee and banders to coordinate volunteer monitors. This is a new, flexible position to be defined by whoever agrees to take it on.

Nest Box Coordinator

This volunteer heads a team of box builders to obtain supplies for boxes, traps, feeders, etc., and supervises nest box building. You may write articles for the newsletter and assist in annual training sessions as needed. If you like working with wood, people, and bluebirds, this might be the role for you. 🐦



Does Nest-box Pairing Harm Bluebirds?

This is the title of an article in the current issue of the NABS journal, *Bluebird*, regarding the controversy about placing two boxes close together to reduce competition among bluebirds and swallows. Author Kevin Berner, NABS research chairman from Richmondville, NY, summarizes his findings in the following quote:

"I have observed no evidence on my trails that pairing would lead to lower bluebird levels. In contrast, my bluebird occupancy rates have shown a consistent and long-term increase in paired sites. These paired sites have contributed to high levels of production of two desirable species of native birds [eastern bluebirds and tree swallows]." 🐦

2002 Research Update

Amber Keyser, Research Coordinator

Necropsy Findings

In conjunction with Dr. Pam Burke, DVM, I performed necropsies on 35 dead adult birds last year. In total, PBRP recovered 92 dead adults in 2002, but not all of them were in good enough condition to necropsy.

The amount of information we got from necropsies was also limited by the length of time the birds had been dead. Since we check our boxes only once a week, the birds were dead for several days when we recovered them. This meant that it was impossible to do detailed microbiological and histological studies. However, the findings from a general examination of the internal organs were interesting.

Necropsy Finding	% of adults affected
A. Severely underweight	19%
B. No food in intestinal tract	59%
C. Thorny-headed worms present	57%
D. Internal bleeding present	65%
E. Worms and bleeding present	55%

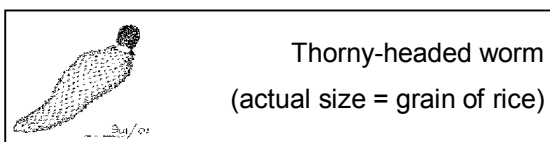
Only 19% of the birds were severely underweight, which indicates that they did not die of starvation, but 59% had completely empty intestinal tracts. This suggests that they were too ill to eat for six to eight hours before dying. Fifty-seven percent had at least one intestinal parasite (thorny-headed worm).

It is doubtful that the presence of a parasite or two would be enough to kill a healthy adult. However, 65% showed signs of massive internal bleeding, a very disturbing result.

One hypothesis is that the presence of parasites that burrow into the intestinal wall causes an internal wound that becomes infected with a toxic bacterium. The bacterial toxins cause internal bleeding and death. This idea is supported by the fact that 55% of the birds with internal bleeding also had parasites. It is possible that the other 45% had parasites at some time in

the past. Alternatively, there are environmental toxins (pesticides and herbicides) that could cause internal bleeding, for example warfarin.

During the 2003 breeding season, we will continue this research. If you find a dead adult bluebird, save it in a clean plastic bag labeled with the (1) date you found the bird, (2) box number, (3) band number, if any, and (4) your name. Put the bird in the freezer and call Amber Keyser at 503.293.3290. Thanks for your help with this important work. ✍



Urban Ecology and Conservation Symposium

On 24 January 2003, Amber Keyser attended a full-day symposium at Portland State University that was organized by the Urban Ecosystem Research Consortium.

This event brought together those working on conservation in the Portland metro area including non-profit, for-profit, and academic ecologists, city planners, wastewater managers, city and county representatives, the Audubon Society, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Amber gave a presentation about Prescott in which she detailed our conservation and research efforts. Many people expressed their interest in our work, and they were very impressed by the research component of our project. Several people commented on the incredible professionalism of our organization. Way to go, Prescott! ✍

Mark Your Calendars

The annual fall wrap-up meeting at the Champoeg Park Visitor Center is set for September 20, 2003, 9:00–Noon. An agenda will be mailed in August to all volunteers. Please plan to attend to vote for new steering committee officers and to share bluebird experiences and knowledge with your peers. ✍

NABS Meeting a Great Success

The annual meeting of the North American Bluebird Society was held in March in Kearney, Nebraska, the winter stopover for the largest gathering of sandhill cranes on the Great Plains. The meeting is now history, and from all accounts it was a tremendous success. It was the largest gathering of bluebirders to date, the speakers were outstanding, the food excellent, the field trips wonderful, and the sandhill cranes mind boggling! Unfortunately, no one from Prescott was able to attend.

Pat Johnston, Prescott past president, and Elsie Eltzroth, NABS past director from Corvallis, were slated to attend, but their flights were cancelled due to the record-breaking snowstorm that closed the Denver Airport for two days. Elsie took the shuttle from Corvallis to Portland before she learned that her flight was cancelled. At least Pat was forewarned. They were both very disappointed to miss the conference, but they intend to get together soon and drown their sorrows in a glass of good Oregon pinot noir -- maybe even two glasses.

The 2004 NABS conference will be held in Ithaca, New York, in July. Home to the famous Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca is in the Finger Lakes region that has over 100 wineries, a science center, museums, and beautiful scenery that includes eastern bluebird trails.

All Prescott volunteers are encouraged to join NABS. Regular membership is only \$20 per year, and you'll receive quarterly copies of *Bluebird*, the NABS journal, that always contains valuable bluebird information. ✍

Calling All Monitors!

The next newsletter deadline is November 1. Please keep it in mind as you monitor your routes, observe bluebird behavior, and experience unusual or memorable events. We want you to share these events at the September 20 wrap-up meeting and read about them here. Please jot down what happened and send me a note via email (cstefanick@hotmail.com) or call 503.233.8946 and describe your experience so it can be included in the fall newsletter. ✍

What Should We Do About Hawks?

The following was excerpted from *Bluebird Trails and Tales*, newsletter of the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, fall 2002.

A letter to the editor from a bluebirder named Nancy reported that she had watched from her front window as a hawk captured a flicker. Although the flicker was able to escape, Nancy was upset and felt that drastic steps should be taken against hawks for their bad behavior. Here is the reply from the newsletter editor.

Nancy's feelings that there are too many hawks seem to be shared by many bluebird monitors according to postings on Bluebird-L (an Internet listserv).

Raptor species have been severely persecuted over the years by man. Bounties were paid for owls as late as 1965. In spite of lifting bounties on raptors, some species have been slow to rebound. I believe, as does Nancy, that God placed all creatures on earth to fulfill a purpose. The hawks take only the "S" birds — the sick, slow, stupid, and surplus.

By removing sick birds from the environment, they prevent the spread of disease. By preventing overpopulation of species, they ensure enough food for the remaining numbers. By removing the slow and dim-witted birds, only the strongest and sharpest survive to pass on their genes.

Some hawks eat mostly mammals, others such as sharp-shinned and Cooper's feed primarily on songbirds. If they don't eat, they die. Their role in the environment is as crucial as the songbirds' role.

Bluebirds and other songbirds have survived and sustained their populations alongside hawks for millennia. It is man's interference that has caused declines in both. ✍



Thank You Dan Brown and Your Nest Box Builders

Corinne Stefanick, Secretary

I was recently at Brenda McGowan's barn where we store nest boxes and other equipment and was again amazed at our great fortune to have such a large inventory just waiting to be used. Our team of nest box builders excels at accumulating raw materials and creating everything monitors need to help the birds.

Until this year, **Dan Brown** was our nest box coordinator. He recruited, trained, inspired, and supervised the box-building team, and all of us thank Dan for his contributions to Prescott and will miss working with him.

As a member of the steering committee, he created the nest box coordinator role and attended all the meetings. He demonstrated the team's latest inventions at the training sessions and always brought a truckload of boxes, traps, poles, and other equipment for distribution. He also organized volunteer builders to assemble pre-cut boxes with children and their parents at many events, such as the annual Champoeg Bluebird Festival and the Portland Yard, Garden, and Patio Show. Though this year the steering committee decided to cut back on events such as these, Dan and his team never faltered in helping in the past.

Dan is a special education teacher in the Portland system, grew up in the Midwest, and moved to Portland in 1982. He began monitoring in 1998 on a route on Mountain Home Road. Later when asked to help with the box-building effort, he built about 300 boxes and invited other builders to get involved. Eventually, Dan recruited a motivated team of carpenters who filled Brenda's barn. For example, team member **Jack Stennett** constructed about 1700 boxes while working with Dan, and **Leonard Walker** perfected the slot-box design and built about 200 of them.

When Champoeg Park staff replaced old redwood picnic tables and benches, Dan procured the weathered old redwood and organized work parties to haul, disassemble, and

prep the two-inch thick boards for nest boxes. **Frank Abderhalden** took over building them and produced many of these handsome boxes that are particularly good for use in colder locations at higher elevations.

Charlie Stalzer is another member of Dan's team who worked with him to develop and build cylindrical designer boxes for sale at events. We're also pleased that Charlie recently volunteered to share his computer expertise by taking over maintenance and expansion of our web site from **Mark Jager** who pioneered the site and always gave generously of his time and expertise. Thank you Mark and Charlie!

Finally, we all send our thanks to Dan for taking over a difficult job and consistently contributing his creativity, good spirit, management style, and high-quality craftsmanship to produce nest boxes that are the key to bluebird recovery. His team continues their fine work and will replenish supplies as needed. Thank you all! 🦋

Bluebirds in Wasco County Have a New Friend

Pat Johnston, Past President

Dick Rife of The Dalles has become a bluebird advocate in northern Wasco County. After seeing western bluebirds in his area, he traveled to Bickleton, the bluebird capital of Washington State and attended the Champoeg Bluebird Festival to gather information about starting a bluebird trail in his area.

Since then he has built and erected 77 nest boxes and plans to increase the number this year. He uses our Prescott nest box plans and paints them ala Bickleton — the body of the box is white and the roof blue.

The landowners he contacted were cooperative, and Dick placed his 77 boxes on four loops that have been successful with 52 nesting attempts. Of 235 eggs laid, 202 nestlings fledged. His boxes produced two broods of tree swallows and one brood each of ash-throated flycatchers and wrens. What a great beginning! With true western hospitality, Dick has invited us to come visit his trails, but call him first at 541.206.3602. 🦋

Donations Gratefully Received

Brenda McGowan, Treasurer

Prescott thanks **GI Joe's in Sherwood** for their generous discount on hand warmers that our volunteers use in some nest boxes during the cold wet spring.

The following generous supporters donated fifty dollars or more between April 2002 and March 2003, for which we are most grateful. It is through this kind of support that we are able to provide materials and equipment to Prescott volunteers.

Gloria and Leonard Attrell
The Autzen Foundation
Backyard Bird Shops collection jars
Estelle Barbur
David and Merla Beltz
Donald and Susan Blanchard
Wayne and Judy Brown
Robert Burbank
Chehalem Garden Club, donor Mary Brillas
Alice Deming
Rod and Doris Diman
Archibald and Adah Doty
Stan and Colleen Freidberg
Feathered Friends
Chris Feves
Barbara Hinman
Diantha and Jan Knott
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Cheryl Neal
Marshall Page and Fran Fulwiler
David and Kay Pollack
Lola Remington
Reuben Rich
Lewis and Barbara Schaad
Loren and El Marine Shipley
Ross and Audrey Shutts, in honor of 60th
Wedding Anniversary
Roger and Joan Smith
Cathy and Joe Thaler
Connie Tyson
Jean Wallace
George and Nadine Wendland
Jan Whittlesey
Diane Wills
Mark and JoAnn Wiltrakis
Alf and Ardyth Wyller



Growing Your Own Mealworms

Kit Whittaker, Monitor

Have you ever wondered just what those mealworms we all feed our bluebird friends really are? Well, they are the larva stage of the darkling beetle. If our bluebirds didn't get them first, those mealworms would go on to their adult stage as dark brown beetles about three quarters of an inch long, members of the nocturnal *Tenebrionidae* family.



Growing your own mealworms makes an ideal science project. It's a great demonstration of the insect life cycle: egg, larva, pupa, adult. The set-up is simple and the action is fast, perfect for kids. Within a week of starting our mealworm farm, my granddaughter, Kylie, and I were surprised to find that our mealworms had become soft, white, motionless pupa.

About ten days later we saw the first dark brown beetle skitter under its incubating chamber. Now we're waiting for eggs to hatch into our first home-raised batch of mealworms. Not to count our mealworms before they are hatched, but we hope to have hundreds by the time our bluebird friends are ready for them!



You, too, can raise your own endless supply of mealworms. Thanks to Back Yard Birds, Friends of Prescott has a supply of mealworm farm kits available to volunteers. The kit includes everything but the mealworms themselves. All the action takes place in a plastic raising tray with a see-through top that's about the size of a large cake pan. Also included is the special grain mixture that provides all the needed nutrients. I put a heating pad under the tray to raise the temperature, and I keep a supply of cut carrots and potatoes in the slotted feeding bowl to provide moisture.

For more information, leave a message on the Prescott voice mail, 503-245-8449. Happy farming! 🐛

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See the original article on page 16 of the Audubon Newsletter.

<http://swiftnet.com/audubon3/warblers/april03.pdf>