Longtime Bluebird Caretaker Turns Over Reigns
By Nancy Kay (Reprinted with permission of Rossmoor News)

Each Saturday in early 1971, Don Yoder and his wife trekked from San Francisco to Rossmoor to check on the construction of their new home. As he watched the bulldozer clear the trees from the property, Yoder noticed some bluebirds in a state of frenzy. Their nests had been wiped out.

“Here we were, going to enjoy our new home while their homes had been taken away,” recalled Yoder.

The couple moved in the following November but Yoder was unable to erase from his mind the inequity of the bluebird situation. He decided to make a difference. Reaching back to his Illinois farm upbringing, he recalled that bluebirds need cavities to survive, so he built some boxes and placed them in nearby trees.

“I didn’t have time to monitor them nor did I know how,” Yoder said, “but by the fall of ’72, five out of the six boxes had nests.” Now, 35 years later, after running a giant one-man bluebird recovery program at Rossmoor and becoming nationally renowned as a bluebird expert, Yoder, because of family reasons, is retiring from his bluebird work.

“Don founded the CBRP in 1974 and has since dedicated countless hours to the preservation of bluebirds in California. From all members of the CBRP and the many bluebirders who helped over the years, we say, “Thank you Don for a job well done!”
I cannot express how honored I am to be the editor of this newsletter. Last fall, Dick Blaine contacted me and asked if I would be interested. He told me that Patsy Kahl was retiring and it was time she handed the publishing duties to someone else.

All I could promise Dick was, “I will do my best to continue the tradition of publishing such a fine newsletter.”

For the first issue, I decided not to stray too far from the traditional layout. Be warned however, future issues will be different. I hope to improve the newsletter in three key areas.

First, I would like to add more color and graphics. In order to keep printing costs reasonable, the newsletter has been published in black & white. We will still publish a uni-color issue for mailing, but I hope to provide a color format for e-mailing.

Second, I would like to extend the content to include more “How-To’s” and experiences from bluebirders all over the state of California. Yes, this means you are invited to write articles.

Finally, I hope all of you will consider receiving future issues of the newsletter via e-mail. This will save a lot of money and a lot of trees.

Traditionalists — do not be concerned! We will continue to send a printed version of the newsletter to any CBRP member who prefers it.

As Dick describes to my left, this issue is dedicated to the vision, dedication, and plain old hard work of Don Yoder. Stop and think for a minute how many cavity nesters this humble man has fledged through his efforts.

Don Yoder is living proof that one man can make a difference. Don, from every corner of California, a big thumbs-up!

MGS
Michael G. Spohn
Edit—Bluebirds Fly!
mspohn@socalbluebirds.org

Policy on Subscriptions to Bluebirds Fly!

The cost of printing and mailing one issue of the newsletter exceeded the amount of donations this year. We are going to enforce the following policy to save money. We sent out over 700 copies of  Bluebirds Fly! earlier this year. This policy will reduce the number of copies to 350. Hopefully these are the people who are still participating in the program. In order to receive the printed Bluebirds Fly! in a given year you must be:

1. An Audubon chapter, bluebird or other environmental organization, contractual partner or other organization exchanging newsletters with us.
2. County Coordinator or trail monitor submitting a report within the past two years.
3. Subscriber donating a minimum of $5 for 1 year (1 additional year per $10 donated)

This issue is being mailed to the full list of 700; if the word "LAST" appears in the address field, this will be your last issue unless you meet one of the listed condition prior to the next issue. However, we will continue to make the newsletter available on our web site, http://cbrp.org for all to read.
California Bluebird Recovery Program
County Coordinators

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<th>Name</th>
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Longtime Bluebird Caretaker Turns Over Regns (Cont. Page—1)

boxes every Monday, the day the golf courses are closed. Servicing includes cleaning, repairing, and when necessary, replacing the boxes.

Yoder also has carefully monitored the boxes and kept meticulous records as to how many occupants the boxes have had and the resulting fledging count.

With his dedication to the bluebirds, how does Yoder feel about turning over the job to others? His feelings are mixed. "I'm going to miss the chance to be in contact with many people by phone and correspondence," he said.

As director of the California Bluebird Recovery Program and his association with the North American Bluebird Society, he gets calls from people all over the country who have found his name on the Web. "Not long ago," he said, laughing, "I got a call at 6:45 a.m. from a woman in Florida. She must have been nervous and didn't think about the time difference. She wanted to know if she should take two eggs out of a nest."

On the other hand, Yoder feels that his retirement is only fair to others. "All these years it's been a one-man program. I think the program will improve by having more people involved."

Editor's Note: Special thanks to the Rossmoor News for providing this article. It was the best historical piece I could find on Don's service to the CBRP.

The Director's Chair (Cont. Page—2)

me (via USPS) in June or did NOT receive several messages by email, I do not have your email address. Please check your personal data in the database (PERSONAL INFORMATION screen) and make corrections if necessary.

Finally, I want to remind you that CBRP is a NABS affiliate and as such, our members are entitled to a half price membership. This offer applies not only to affiliate members who are joining NABS for the first time but also to renewals and extensions. It runs from 1/1/2007 to 12/31/08, and reduces NABS memberships to $15.00 per year for both single and household memberships. This is a reduction from $20.00 for single and $30.00 for household. See the NABS web site, or contact Pauline Tom, NABS Membership Chairperson, (512) 268.5678 or email him at ptom676@gmail.com.

About the California Bluebird Recovery Program

Our Mission

- Enlist current bluebirders and recruit others who will help reestablish bluebirds to their normal habitat
- Locate preferred habitat for the placement of nestboxes suitable for bluebirds
- Secure monitors to care for the boxes and keep systematic records of the development of young birds during the nesting season
- Record and analyze all annual summaries of nestbox records
- Provide a forum (newsletter) through which fellow trail monitors can exchange information and secure help in solving problems encountered in the field.

Learn More

To learn more about the California Bluebird Recovery Program and other cavity nester conservation programs, visit the below web sites:

http://www.cbrp.org
http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org
http://www.socalbluebirds.org
http://www.sialis.org

If you are looking for a mentor, start by contacting the county coordinator in your county listed on page 10. You can also contact Dick Blaine (dick@theblaines.net) or Mike Spohn (mspohn@socalbluebirds.org).

Please consider supporting our efforts. There is a donation form on the back page of this newsletter. Your contribution is tax-deductible and goes a long way in helping us conserve the bluebird population in California.
Editor's Note

Every once in a while, I come across someone who is so special, I am stunned into total awe. The below story about Jimmy Sparrer in York County, VA is one such person. Blinded since 1953, Jimmy uses power tools to build nestboxes! I am sure you will agree, his story is incredible.

You can find the video of Jimmy here: http://www.dailypress.com/birdhouse

Saving the Bluebirds—A blind man in York County builds a bounty of birdhouses

By Kathy Van Mullekom (Reprinted with permission of The Daily Press, Newport News, VA)

YORK COUNTY — Jimmy Sparrer is a blind man’s best friend. During the past 53 years, he’s built over 3,000 birdnest boxes for the brilliant bluebirds he never sees.

Blind since a hunting accident in 1953, Sparrer, now 84, crafts bluebird nesting boxes in a lean-to style workroom in his home in Seaford. He uses power equipment - table saw and drill press - and a hammer to assemble the boxes. His hands guide his every move.

"Y'all look but don’t talk to me," he said simply, as he reached into a box from which he put together boxes. "I like to concentrate and know where everything is," he says. "I can’t see anything, but I’ve got tools and I’ve learned to manipulate them much more than I used to be able to.

"Since I’ve been blind, I don’t shop, he listens to books and magazines," says Sparrer, who occasionally makes picnic tables and small furniture pieces for family and friends.

"Where did my block go?" he says. Because he can’t see increments on a measuring tape, he uses pre-cut blocks of wood to measure spacings on the boxes.

Sparrer works at a long wooden table while Beethoven plays over a public radio station. He admires Tchaikovsky’s Sixth and Beethoven’s Ninth symphonies, and he listens to the radio that keeps him company.

"Most of the time, bluebirds were almost extinct because of the destruction of the nesting boxes. I try to save them. When I’m messing around these bluebirds, I enjoy them," says Sparrer, smiling and looking toward the radio that keeps him company.

"I missed it," he says, reaching inside the box to feel where the nails came out.

Still not satisfied he had the box aligned properly, he uses a wooden wedge to force the sides out so they meet a pocket full of nails. When I put this nail in my mouth, I know where it is," he says.

It started on July 2, 2007, when Robert McNab of Laguna Niguel placed a request on the Internet site "Rob’s List" for some help on saving four—2-day-old bluebird chicks and an unhatched egg. This plea was seen by Beverly Gandall who forwarded it to Sully Reallon who forwarded it to Dick Purvis who called me.

Since I monitor nestboxes in nearby Laguna Regional Park, I checked my boxes looking for prospective ‘adoptive’ parents. I found a box with 3 eggs about to hatch.

We decided to transfer Robert’s four 2-day-old chicks and unhatched egg to my nestbox. In addition we spread mealworms under the tree hoping that the adoptive parents were watching.

On July 8th, I checked the adoptive box and all of the new chicks appeared to be thriving. They were being taken care of by the adoptive parents. I spread more mealworms and watched an adult feed a chick on to a chick.

The Diary of Four Orphaned Bluebird Chicks

By Earl Garrison

This is a story about four orphaned bluebird chicks that survived despite some unusual circumstances. It involves people who are dedicated to protecting these beautiful birds.

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I returned on July 7th, and saw all 8 chicks were alive. As I spread more mealworms, I wondered how the parents could feed all 8 chicks and how they all could survive in a single nestbox.

On July 8th, I noticed that there were two full nests in the adoptive nestbox—one on top of the other. I separated the nests, put one nest in a second nestbox, added the 4 orphans and hung the nestbox right beside the original nestbox. I was encouraged that both parents watched these procedures.

I spread more mealworms and watched as the parents fed chicks in both nestboxes. So now, each nestbox had 4 chicks in it. The 4 younger chicks were in nestbox #1 and the 4 orphaned chicks were in nestbox #2.

I checked both nestboxes again on July 9th and found one dead chick in nestbox #1. The remaining chicks were alive and the 4 chicks in nestbox #2 appeared to be OK.

On July 10th, all chicks appeared to be lethargic but I could have been wrong because it was a hot day. On subsequent days I found both parents attending to the chicks in both nestboxes and they were growing rapidly.

I checked both nestboxes on July 12th and all chicks seemed to be thriving.

On July 16th, Robert McNab and I checked both nestboxes and all chicks have feathers and Robert was quite pleased with their progression.

On July 25th, Sully Reallon checked the boxes and reported that all 4 of the orphaned chicks have fledged. Sully advised that 2 of the chicks from the nestbox #1 fledge[d] yester-day with one or two fat chick remaining who was begging for more food.

On July 28th, Sully checked on the last chick and noticed it was covered with some kind of lice and was not very active, nor were there any adults around. He took the chick out of the nestbox and went to the Animal & Bird Clinic in Mission Viejo to try to save it. Unfortunately, the chick was DOA—very sad.

Throughout this care-taking I was helped immensely by fellow South-ern California Bluebird Club member Dick Purvis and others who provided sage advice. Linda Violet also helped by providing mealworms that we used to help feed the nestlings.

All things considered, I think our combined efforts in saving the 4 orphaned chicks was successful, even if 2 other chicks didn’t survive.

Huell Howser Show

(Cont. Page—8)

In a nearby tree. Since I hadn’t checked the nestbox for a week or so, I wasn’t sure if the eggs had hatched until I took a peek inside. I was elated, and Huell’s amazement, the nest held 5 five beautiful white eggs nestled in a bed of soft downy feathers. He filmed these as several swallows nosily flew overhead.

From there we walked a hundred yards or so to a tree that had a WEBL nest in it. I was not too surprised when it contained five blue eggs. As he filmed, he could see the two adults hopping nearer to the nestbox site and so he got some good footage of both the male and female.

After I replaced the nestbox, the adults edged even closer to it and I suggested that if we moved back a bit, one of them might fly to the entry hole. Almost on cue, the male did just that and disappeared into the nestbox - all caught on film. I was elated. It was almost as if Huell had written a script and was able to get the bluebirds to perform on cue.

The filming ended on that note and it was only 11:00 AM! Huell thought the filming went well and I told him if he was happy, I was happy. We shook hands and went our separate ways.

That afternoon as I was thinking about the day’s events, it seemed almost surreal. I helped create a future in a very popular Huell Howser television program about our bluebirds.

Now I can relax!

Order a DVD of the show (8128) http://www.calgold.com/green

(Cont. Page—5)
Southern CA Bluebird Club Featured on Huell Howser Show

By Bob Franz

Huell Howser comes to Placentia. That's right, I'm talking about the Huell Howser, who can be seen on KCET even though his programs are called "California's Gold" and "California's Green," among others. This last was sent to me to film a story on bluebirds.

I am a regular viewer of the various programs that Huell Howser produces on KCET. Most of them deal with historical and geographical features in California that many of us have never seen. A few years back it occurred to me that the beautiful bluebirds were a stunning feature in California and that very few people have seen them, or even knew they existed.

I contacted Huell Howser Productions and started a dialogue that resulted in his agreeing to film a story about bluebirds during this nesting season.

Now the hard part; when to schedule the filming. Huell preferred to film at different sites and look at a few nests, trails which typically produce the largest number of fledglings that have not yet reported.

The Winter 2006-7 Bluebirds Fly! (v13, number 1) contains an article providing the background and reasons for the automated approach to end-of-season reporting. For more information, see the section about End-of-Season reporting on the CBRP web site, http://www.cbrp.org.

Four ways to send in your results are discussed; but we hope you will select to use the on-line data base. If you do, we do not have to enter data manually. To access the on-line database go to the following link http://cbp.theblaines.net. This page provides instructions and help for using the actual data-entry site as well as a link to the latter. Your contact and trail information were pre-entered based on the most recent Annual Reports. For most of you, your User-ID (login ID) and password are your first initial and last name. Please change your password the first time you login to secure your personal information.

Don't hesitate to contact me or the county coordinators who are database administrators for assistance.

Huell's team finished the introduction quickly, stowed the camera, and followed us to my Loma Vista Memorial Park in Fullerton. I introduced Huell and his team to Susan Bluger, who monitors 13 nestboxes in the park. I chose this cemetery for two reasons: (1) it was a golf course where I wanted Huell to film, and (2) Susan employs a unique 2-hole nesting box.

The filming went well, especially when Huell saw four, 12-day old nestlings inside. When he saw them Huell kinda shook and made sure the cameraman got good footage of them nestled in their nest. We moved on to Coyote Hills Golf Course at the putting green area. I chose this site because it has a beautiful waterfeature, lake and stream.

There is a nestbox with Tree Swallow nesting season. There is a nestbox with Tree Swallows in Placentia at about 9 AM. First, he filmed the introduction to my house in Placentia at about 9 AM. First, he filmed the introduction where I wanted Huell to film, and 2) the pair is pieced together at the bottom. When everything is finished, except adding the hangers, he makes a table saw cut down the middle to separate them. He's only cut himself once, slightly up perfectly.

"Feel that, it's not even," he says, guiding a visitor's hand inside the box.

"I don't think the bluebirds would mind if it weren't exactly close," he says. "But, you mind, right?" says a visitor.

"Yep," he answers, still working to get the sides where they should be.

"You've just got to be smarter than the wood, that's all."

Sparrer's unique pattern for making bluebird boxes means he crafts two at a time.

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Using Google Earth To Track Nestboxes
By Dick Blaine

Many of us have looked for an easy and inexpensive way to map nest box locations. This can be done manually and approximately, but better methods are available. The advent of inexpensive Global Positioning System (GPS) units can locate the boxes within 20' which is sufficient in most cases. Software is available to map the locations.

Mapping of equipment such as power poles, transformers, sensors and many other items is done by Cities, Utility Companies and corporations using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These programs are far to expensive and complex for most of us. Some of us have tried to use programs such as DeLorme's Street Atlas, Google Maps (My Maps), Microsoft's Streets and Trips and even Photoshop. However, the "trails" (parks, forests, cemeteries or trails) are not generally shown with much internal structure (buildings, trees, paths) to allow placement of the nest boxes with any accuracy.

In recent years, Google Earth has become available. It is a free, downloadable, relatively fast, easy to navigate, and provides extensive coverage of the US and many other parts of the world. This program differs from Street Atlas, Google Maps, and Street and Trips in that it displays 3D color satellite images as well as street type. It displays to a fairly high degree of resolution.

Since images are displayed, the details of the "trail" - trees, walking paths, fences, etc. are easily discernable. Also, the program has the ability to overlay geographic features such as city boundaries, roads, points of interest such as coffee shops, and much more.

In addition to the basic navigation (location, tilting, and zoom) and 3D display ability, the free version of Google Earth has several features directly applicable to mapping nest boxes.

1. Placemarks
A Placemark displays as an icon (pin, point, circle, diamond, etc) of various size, shape and color which can be located on the image:

A) By dragging the icon with the cursor and/or
B) By specifying GPS coordinates in any of several formats (degrees, minutes & seconds or degrees as decimals)

Each icon has its own color, size and shape. In addition titles and descriptions can be specified when the Placemark is defined. This information can be displayed by clicking on the icon.

2. Overlays
If you are fortunate (as I am) to have a detailed map of the "trail", Google Earth allows it to be overlaid on top of the satellite image and adjusted to fit to the same size. If not, you still have a nice map showing the locations of the nest boxes.

An example, the trail I monitor, McClellan Ranch Park in Cupertino, CA, is approximately 1000' x 1500'

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Using Google Earth To Track Nestboxes
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and contains 30 nest boxes. The Google Earth "trail" can be sized to fill a 19" display screen and print on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. It clearly shows all the nest box icons, buildings, trails, trees, etc.

Opposite is a screen shot showing the list of Placemarks on the left and the composite map on the right. One of the Placemarks is open illustrating the title and descriptive comments. The overlay image is in black and white and comprises Stevens Creek, the community gardens, several buildings and may annotations. The program file contains the image portion only.

This article is not intended to be a tutorial or step-by-step guide to creating the maps, but rather an overview. The user site and help on Google Earth provides adequate user information. Following is an overview as to how I created the "trail" map.

1. Open Google Earth and zoom to the "trail" using the basic navigation tools or by specifying the address or zip code of the "trail" so that it nearly fills the screen.

2. Insert a Placemark by dragging its icon to the location of the nest box or by entering the latitude and longitude into the dialog box which opens for the Placemark. Enter a title and description if desired. Also configure the size, shape and color of the Placemark.

Different configurations could be used to signify the nest box size (small, standard or large), the species currently occupying the box, number of eggs, hatchlings or fledglings; type of box; or any other property of the box.

The title should be brief as it always displays - the box number makes a good title. Finally, enter a description to document box type, size or other. Repeat this step for each nest box. Be sure to save the Placemarks when saving your file.

3. Overlay
An overlay map can be created by scanning a park brochure, trail map, or other handout available at the "trail" or from a web site and creating an image file (jpg, bmp, tiff, etc.). This map can be cleaned up in Photoshop or other image processing program so that only significant features remain, e.g., streets, trees, parks, important buildings, etc. Annotations can be added if desired.

The next step is to make the background of the map transparent so that the white background does not obscure the color satellite image and Placemarks created by Google Earth. This is easily done in Photoshop (or other program with similar capabilities). Use the paint tool to change the background from white to transparent. The resultant file must be saved as a "png" file as that is the only image format Google Earth can read which preserves the transparency property.

4. The Final Map
Now we create the final "trail" map by combining the satellite image already containing the Placemarks and the overlay created in the previous step. To do so, open the Google Earth "trail" map which was previously saved and overlay the "png" file (add/overlay image). Using the "resize" handles, move the overlay around to fit on the "trail" map.

Finally save the result as a "kmz" file which can be easily updated in the future if a new nest box is moved or changed. This file contains all of the Placemark and overlay information and can be emailed or posted on a web site for anyone to view and modify (don't forget to include the "png" file). Alternately, save the file as a "jpg" image file, this type of file can also be printed, mailed and/or posted on the web but is not easily updated.

I have not detailed the process, but am willing to provide assistance by email to anyone who would like to follow this procedure. Please become familiar with the basic navigation features and the use of Place- marks in Google Earth prior to contacting me. The free version of Google Earth can be downloaded from:

1) http://earth.google.com
The official Google site

2) earth.download.googlepages.com/ gpe-curb
A user oriented site which also contains download, install and usage information.

Other sites are:
Google Earth Plus ($20) provides GPS device support including downloading way points, faster performance, the ability to import spreadsheets, and higher resolution printing.

Google Earth Pro ($400) includes many professional features.

A Call For Action
By Michael G. Spohn

The devastation to the bluebird habitat caused by the wildfires is Southern CA is hard to comprehend. Altogether, more than a dozen fires wiped clean more than 503,000 acres - the equivalent of 796 square miles. At least three people have been killed by flames. About 1,700 homes have been destroyed and damage estimates have surpassed $1 billion.

We must provide nesting cavities in these areas in 2008.