



CALIFORNIA BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROGRAM

A NON-PROFIT PROJECT

Sponsored Jointly by
National Audubon Society - Western Region
and
North American Bluebird Society

For the Encouragement and Preservation
of Cavity Nesters
Especially Bluebirds
Anywhere in the West

2021 PTARMIGAN DRIVE #1, WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA 94595

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Bluebirds Brood For Two Years by Don Yoder

It has taken two years for this newsletter to hatch. Those great contributors who have helped supply grass for the nest have probably long kissed it goodbye, believing all eggs to be infertile. We hope this new publication will prove their fears unfounded.

We will strive to make future bulletins interesting, helpful, and informative; to appeal to people with various experience levels.

Our goals in starting the California Bluebird Recovery Program are brief: Promote and aid in any way possible the increase in population of native cavity nesting birds, bluebirds especially, in California.

This is an organization of and for those who want to promote the welfare of Western Bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds, and other native cavity nesting birds. Your ideas for this effort are sought and needed. We will use as many dandy ideas and reports as space permits. We intend this to be an on-going, self-sustaining enterprise. It perfectly fills a niche in Audubon's "Birds in the Balance" program to "keep common birds common". We are grateful to **Bob Barnes**, Audubon's Western Region Coordinator for Birds in the Balance, who has helped guide our fledging.

Bluebird Recovery Arrives by Bob Barnes

Before your eyes is a **complimentary copy** of the first newsletter of the California Bluebird Recovery Program. This newsletter is a first effort. The layout, format, and graphics will improve over time. With your input this newsletter should get better and better. This first issue gets the ball rolling.

By way of background...

On September 1, 1994, I gave a slide and lecture presentation on National Audubon Society's Birds in the Balance Program (the goal of which is to "keep common birds common") to Mount Diablo Audubon Society in Contra Costa County. **Don Yoder** came up to me after the program to discuss bluebirds, Audubon, and the North American Bluebird Society in California. Several meetings and phone calls since have resulted in the commencement of the California Bluebird Recovery Program.

Mount Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS) has offered to act as treasurer. Therefore, all **donations to the California Bluebird Recovery Program should be made out to MDAS-Bluebirds and mailed to Don Yoder** for passage on to the MDAS treasurer. For more on the issues of costs and donations see **Money Matters** on page 6.

Monitoring: What Does It Mean? Why Is It Important? by Don Yoder

Habitat destruction has made it very difficult for bluebirds, and other avian species to live in their accustomed areas. To aid them in their recovery of numbers, bluebird aficionados build and place suitable nesting boxes which bluebirds may use to supplement natural nesting cavities.

The placement of boxes injects our efforts into their livelihood and way of life. Therefore, we need to take every means at our disposal to be of assistance in their nesting and efforts to raise their families.

Monitoring means regular and periodic visits to each box (a minimum of once a week is recommended) to observe and record activities and developments in each box. Noting when a nest is built, when eggs are first laid and their numbers, when brooding begins, and when hatching occurs; all are events that should be noted. The date and numbers of fledged young are of great interest. Finally, increases or declines in numbers of adult birds can be estimated.

Box placement should be done for the good of the birds. If we are not going to monitor, boxes should not be provided at all. Too many curable problems can be missed if we do not monitor on a regular basis.

Here are just a few of the problems and indications that monitoring can detect:

Predation by raccoons, squirrels, cats - grass protruding from the box hole; disturbed nest, broken or missing eggs recorded earlier; occupant feathers on ground; dead or missing adults or hatchlings.

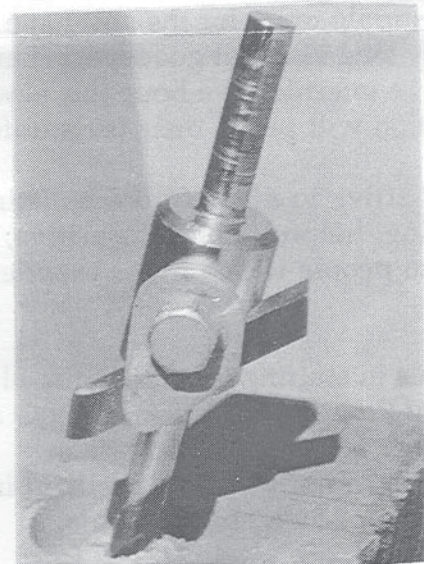
Paper Wasp - will drive off, with or without a wasp nest started, any interested bird tenant even though a bird nest may have been begun.

Please see **Monitoring**, page 6

Bluebird Bits and Pieces by Don Yoder

For a year or longer opinion has been growing that Mountain and Western Bluebirds need boxes with floor space larger than 4" x 4" and entrance holes increased to 1 9/16". Perhaps more people have found a way to do that than we realize. Most wood bit sets don't include that size. We know of 3 ways to get the job done:

- An **expansion bit** for use in a brace. The expansion bits are adjustable to infinite settings but are slow for builders of large numbers of boxes. They are available from any hardware store.
- A **circle cutter** (see photo) or wheel cutter, with reversible bit. The circle cutter is adjustable to infinite settings with a crescent wrench. It is conveniently handled in a drill press.



- The dandiest of all, for a price, is a 1 9/16" **Forstner bit** with a 3/8 inch shaft. This bit, and the circle cutter mentioned above, cut clean holes. Just don't push too hard and burn the edges. The Forstner bit is available from Woodworker's Supply, Casper, Wyoming. The Nov. '94 catalog listed it as item # 828-937 for \$16.95 plus shipping cost of \$5.45.

Readers' Forum

From **Doug Martin, Sylmar**

I was thrilled to hear of your...focus on bluebirds in California. My interest in bluebirds began about four years ago when I noticed an old, unmaintained box at a local park being used by a pair of Plain Titmice. After talking with the park caretaker,...I was permitted to copy the design and place 18 boxes in January of 1992. To my delight 16 out of the 18 were used, some even twice. I have kept fairly detailed records for the past three years, mainly for my own learning and enjoyment...I plan to start Another project at another location nearby...the potential for successful bluebird projects in the foothills surrounding the Los Angeles area is enormous and is only limited by the amount of people willing to invest a little time and effort...Please let me know how I can be involved or help...Looking forward to hearing from you!...

Editor's Note: Mr. Martin's results from 1992-1994 include 57/62 boxes used (92%); 138 Western Bluebirds fledged from 33 successful nestings out of 40 attempts (82.5%); 91 House Wrens fledged from 14 successful nestings out of 15 attempts (93%); 12 Ash-throated Flycatchers fledged from 4 successful nestings out of 9 attempts (44%); 3 Violet-green Swallows fledged from 1 out of 1 attempt (100%).

From **M.H. Wolfe, Bakersfield**

As the contracted coordinator of the biological monitoring on the Coles Levee Ecosystem Preserve, I am interested in learning more about the bluebird recovery program...I do know we have observed Western Bluebirds migrating on Elk Hills which is adjacent to the preserve...if they used to breed on the southern San Joaquin Valley floor, I am sure some things could be done to enhance habitat, e.g. nest boxes, etc., which I used to do in New Mexico for Mountain Bluebirds.

From **Eartha Newsong, Lafayette**

Please put me on your mailing list...I once helped in N.H. with a program like this and had lots of bluebirds coming to several boxes...Thanks...

From **Bob and Betty Potts, Coarsegold**

In response to...Fresno Audubon's *Yellowbill* about bluebirds...We are located between Coarsegold and Oakhurst (in Madera County) at the 2800 foot level in pine-oak woodlands. On and off for 13 years we have had nesting Western bluebirds nearby. In 1981, we installed natural appearing nesting "boxes" made from downed oaks with pre-existing woodpecker cavities. We cut off the oak log and capped each end with plywood, then attached it to a tree with a couple of large hooks. Eight or ten of these are located around our property...The fact that our nest cavities are made of natural oak logs makes them suitable for photography showing a natural cavity and we have taken many pictures, some with the nestlings putting their heads out a day or two before they fledged...Once (we assume) a snake climbed the tree and we found male feathers in the cavity and the nestlings gone. After that we applied 16" wide sheet metal around the trunks to make it difficult for snakes to get traction....

From **Russell Jones, Walnut Creek**

...I am a member of Mount Diablo Audubon Society as well as the North American Bluebird Society. Last spring with the help of my son's scout den we started a bluebird trail on Lime Ridge...and worked with Don Yoder...We've started with only six boxes...Over the winter we will be building new boxes and expanding the trail...I hope this program takes off and becomes a success. Please keep me informed on anything I can do to help. Thank you...

Please see Readers' Forum, page 4

Readers' Forum continued from page 3

From Leonard S. Cox, Forest Falls

...I am...a member of San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society. I read...the article in our local Audubon newsletter...of...the bluebird recovery program...I have been maintaining a number of bluebird boxes in Mill Creek canyon for the past fifteen years...Basic information as to my efforts: A total of 19 boxes located with 50% occupancy rate by bluebirds. All boxes are used during the season, being occupied by any one of the following: 1. bluebird 2. nuthatch 3. House Wren 4. chickadee 5. Nuttall's or Ladder-backed Woodpecker 6. Ash-throated Flycatcher 7. Plain Titmouse and, lastly, 8. our local yellowjackets or threadwaisted wasp...My boxes are built from pine board with a hinged front "door" for cleaning. All boxes are cleaned and disinfected in the fall or early spring. Boxes are located, in the main, above 6 ft. above ground. This, so I am able to clean them without recourse to a ladder. Of the 19 boxes, 6 are over 6 ft. above ground. These is areas of high human travel, i.e. located close to homes...Problems? inquisitive humans, gun carriers with nothing to kill but bird boxes, the aforementioned wasps, bears!, chipmunks, and Acorn Woodpeckers which enlarge the 1 1/2 inch entrance

More Bits and Pieces
by Don Yoder

When using tools of any kind, be sure to read and follow instructions from the manufacturer. Protect eyes, hands,... everything, plus the person working next to you. Young builders should not be allowed to use power tools. Accidents don't wait to happen.

Cold weather is coming, or upon us. Give consideration to plugging the vent slots on your boxes to keep out cold drafts for overnight users. It can make a real difference to bluebirds and other cavity nesters on cold winter nights.

From Nathan Sweet, Jr., Atascadero

I am responding to an announcement in Morro Coast Audubon Society's newsletter, *Pacific Flyway*...We own four acres...close against the mountains consisting of open grassland broken up by areas of blue, white, and live oak forest...We have placed six bluebird nest boxes on our property in addition to boxes designed to attract titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, Nuttall's and Acorn Woodpeckers, Tree Swallows, and any other hole nesting birds that might come our way. We feed other birds year round and are trying to encourage birds in general by plantings, nest sites, water, and cover...

From Chuck and Lorraine McCullough,
Tehachapi

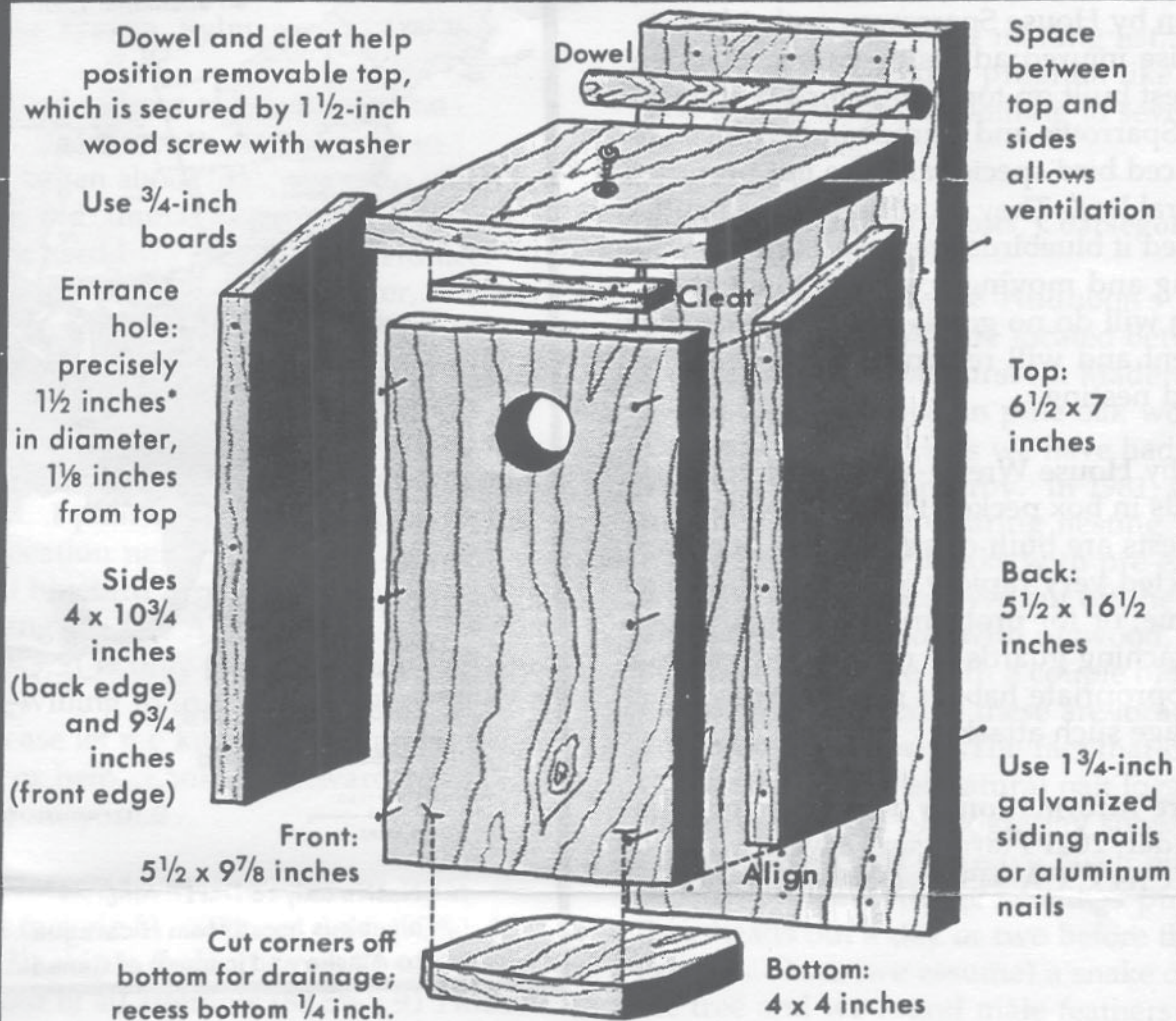
We live in open oak woodlands near Tehachapi and are trying to increase the Western Bluebird population. We keep water out year round and have five blueb houses up...hollowed out oak limb segments...mounted on posts...This past year we had two successful nestings producing 3 young in one and...1 in the other...We are interested in your program. Please let us know how we can be involved...

When constructing **nest boxes** instead of galvanized nails, try using **wall screws**. Drill a small guide hole first: no splits, quick assembly, and easy parts replacement.

Who has those California Environmental License Plates for bluebirds? A number of them are out there. We'd like to hear from you if you have one.

Send us notes about your outstanding successes: experiences with cavity nesters, problems on the trail, solutions. Let us hear from you.

BUILD YOUR OWN BLUEBIRD NESTING BOX



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North American Bluebird Society's Tips For Blazing The Bluebird Trail

- Select good habitat. Open rural country with scattered trees and low or sparse ground cover is best.
- Avoid brushy and heavily wooded areas unless you wish to attract other species.
- Avoid areas where House Sparrows are abundant.
- Avoid areas of extensive pesticide use.
- A roof with a 5 inch overhang helps deter raccoons from reaching the nest. A very heavy coating of lithium grease on the metal post is also helpful in deterring raccoons.
- Mount nesting boxes 5 feet or higher from the ground, preferably on metal pipes.
- Face boxes in any direction, preferably toward a tree or shrub 25' to 100' distant.
- Because of bluebird territorial preferences, boxes may be kept at least 100 yards apart.
- Monitor boxes once a week during nesting.
- Remove House Sparrow nests when found. Remove bluebird and other nests as soon as the young birds have flown.
- Inspect, clean, and repair in winter.

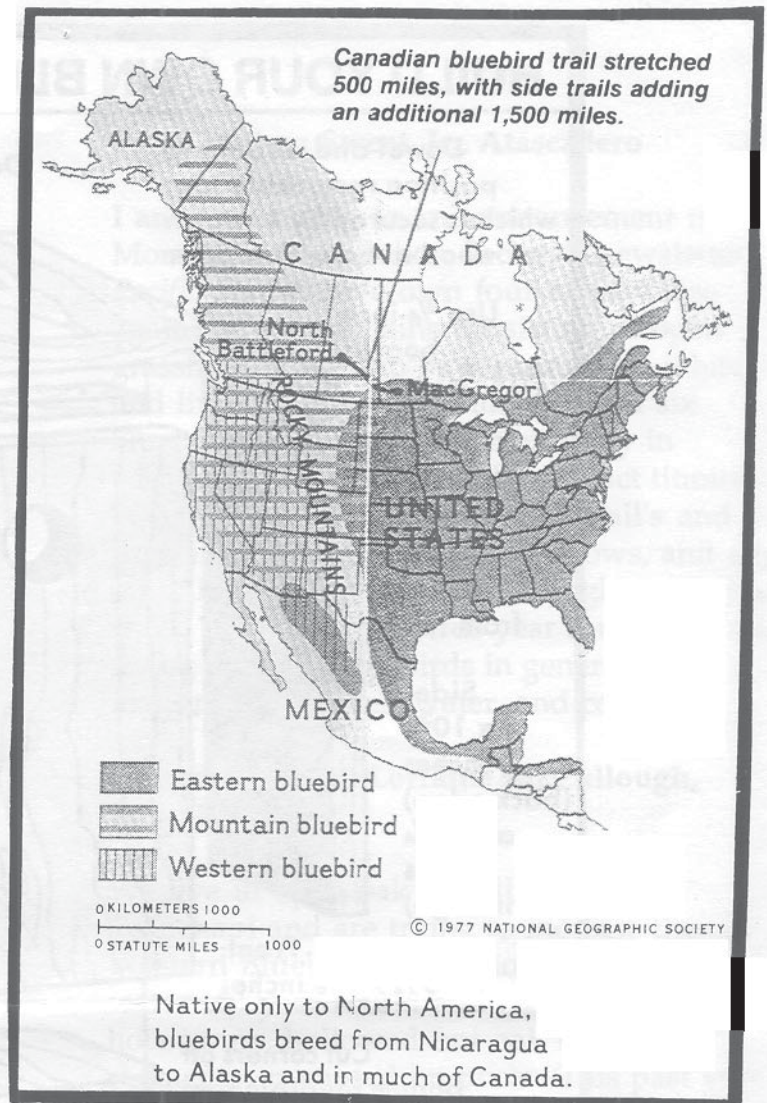
Monitoring continued from page 2

Invasion by House Sparrows - scalped or otherwise injured adults or young; massive grass nest built on top of bluebird nest. Note: House Sparrows and European Starlings are introduced bird species and are **not** protected by federal law. They must be captured and destroyed if bluebirds are to succeed.

Catching and moving sparrows to another location will do no good. They are extremely persistent and will return to interfere with bluebird nesting.

Attack by House Wrens - adult and young bluebirds in box pecked to death. Note: Wren nests are built of small sticks and are constructed very rapidly. Blocking the hole for a time, or for problems mentioned above also, attaching guards or moving the box to a more appropriate habitat may help discourage such attacks.

For more information or help, write or call:
Don Yoder, 2021 Ptarmigan Drive, #1,
Walnut Creek, CA 94595...(510) 937-5974.



Money Matters by Bob Barnes

The California Bluebird Recovery Program is designed to be self-supporting. My professional time is supported by grants from the **National Fish & Wildlife Foundation**, the **David & Lucille Packard Foundation**, the **Joseph M. Long Foundation**, and donations from many **Audubon Chapters** and individuals. **Don Yoder** is retired. His time is entirely voluntary. We are depending on you to make donations to cover out-of-pocket expenses (printing, postage, Don's phone). An accounting of expenses will be presented in newsletters.

This issue of the newsletter cost just over \$500.00 (600 copies at \$0.85 per copy including printing and postage).

To cover the cost of mailing this issue of the newsletter to you, and three more future issues, we are requesting a minimum donation of \$5.00. We do not expect that all 600 recipients of this newsletter will choose to enroll as members of the California Bluebird Recovery Program and receive future issues. Therefore, donations of any amount over \$5.00 will help cover the initial large expense of getting the word out to 600+ people.

Once again, **Mount Diablo Audubon Society (MDAS)** has offered to act as treasurer. Therefore, **all donations to the California Bluebird Recovery Program should be made out to MDAS-Bluebirds and mailed to Don Yoder for passage on to the MDAS treasurer.**

Membership Matters

by Bob Barnes

Being or becoming a member of the **National Audubon Society (NAS)** or **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)** is **not** a requirement for being part of the **California Bluebird Recovery Program**. If you are already a member of NAS, NABS, or both, thank you. If you are not a member of both NAS and NABS, Don Yoder and I are hopeful that you will take the first opportunity to do so.

Membership in the National Audubon Society is \$20.00 for newcomers. A Regular Membership in the North American Bluebird Society is \$15.00. Both organizations have publications. NAS has *Audubon* magazine (6 issues per year). NABS has the journal *SIALIA*. (4 issues per year).

Send National Audubon Society membership checks to:

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555 Audubon Place
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About Audubon

by Bob Barnes

The **National Audubon Society** was founded at the turn of the century as an organization to benefit birds and the people who enjoy them. Today, Audubon has over 500,000 members in over 550 local chapters in all fifty states, Guam, and Latin America. In California there are over 50,000 members in over fifty local chapters. All local chapters

About Audubon

(continued)

have newsletters, monthly programs, and field trips to local areas of interest.

I am the Western Regional Coordinator for Audubon's international effort called the **Birds in the Balance Program**. The bottom line of this program is to "keep common birds common" through education, private lands outreach, and initiatives such as the **California Bluebird Recovery Program**.

North American Bluebird Society Notes by Bob Barnes and Excerpts from NABS

The **North American Bluebird Society** is an incorporated, non-profit organization determined to increase the populations of **Eastern Bluebirds, Western Bluebirds, and Mountain Bluebirds** on this continent.

The SOCIETY studies obstacles impeding bluebird recovery, publishes results of studies, and encourages participation by its membership in all facets of its programs. Through its quarterly journal, *SIALIA*, the SOCIETY addresses such issues as improved nest box design, control of competitors and predators, and enhanced techniques for increasing winter food supply.

The **National Audubon Society's** Western Region **Birds in the Balance Program** is proud to be **co-sponsors** of the **California Bluebird Recovery Program** with **Don Yoder** and the **North American Bluebird Society**.

NABS Wintering Bluebird Notes

Bluebirds often perish in winter from the effects of extreme cold and insufficient food. Nest boxes should remain in place for use on cold winter nights. Plants that hold fruit all winter are particularly helpful. Local plant nurseries usually know the best species. In Their wintering range, bluebirds sometimes use feeders supplied with berries, peanut hearts, and suet.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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