# California Bluebird Recovery Program

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 (510) 937-5974

Volume 1 Number 2

September 1995

## Do the Bluebirds Need a Recovery Program?

by Hatch Graham County Coordinator, El Dorado & Amador Counties

I wrote an emotional plea for everyone to join in with us to restore the bluebird to its former bundance which I wanted to send to the local papers. I presented the article to a local group I belong to, Balance. "How bad off are the Western Bluebirds, Bob?"

"Well, we don't keep too many statistics here in the Regional Office in Sacramento. But I can give you some leads on who might know. Here, call Geoff LeBaron, he's the Christmas Bird Count editor of *Audubon Field Notes*." He gave me his New York number."

I called Geoff and asked him if the Christmas Bird Counts, or anything

# Targeting Native Species

**by Tom Walsh**Squaw Valley, Fresno County

In the early spring of 1991, I noticed a pair of Western Bluebirds in the neighborhood. I live at about 2500 feet elevation in the western Sierra foothills, and the bluebirds were attracted to about one and one-half acres of mowed pasture, surrounded by oak trees, buckeye, and other vegetation characteristic of oak grassland. Because the bluebirds were courting, I knew they would nest *somewhere*. I thought I would encourage them to stay and nest where I could observe them.

Western Bluebirds (Sialia mexicana) are not a particularly gregarious species. However, the region is populated annually or seasonally by several bird species which are notably the House Sparrow and the dreaded Starling. The key was to construct birdhouses which the bluebirds would find acceptable and, at the same time, discourage other 'squatter' species from beating them to the punch.

Western Bluebirds nest in holes in

Please turn to page 4

#### "So how bad off are the bluebirds?"

the El Dorado Writers' Guild, for their critique. One of the members said, "So how bad off are the bluebirds?"

"Well—uh, the Eastern Bluebirds were in a great decline and the bluebird trails in the east really helped."

"So how bad off are the Western Bluebirds? I think it would really help your article if you said they were down 10%, or 20%, or whatever."

Good point," I agreed.

Next day, I called Bob Barnes, National Audubon's Western Regional Coordinator for Birds in else could give us a clue. Well, it turns out that most of the *Notes*' information is turned over to what once was the Fish & Wildlife

Please turn to page 3

In This Issue:	
Bits & Pieces	Page 2
County Coordinators	Page 5
Bluebird Exchange	Page 6
About CBRP	Page 7
Reader's Forum	Page 8
"Creating Bluebird Habitat"	Page 9
Help Wanted	Page 10
Upcoming Events	Page 10
Bluebird Loss	Page 10
New Members	Page 11
Coordinator News	Page 12

# Bits & Pieces

- ✓ In the last newsletter, along with recommending a 1-9/16" hole size, we should also have added a 5x5" floor size: more room for our sturdier Western/ Mountain varieties. Do your own testing: put up a box of each size in some locations, reducing variables, and giving the birds a choice.
- ▲ Another way to enlarge an entrance hole is with a good semiround wood rasp, in addition to the means described in the last newsletter. The holes ought to then be smoothed with sandpaper to prevent ruffling feathers of tenants.
- ▶ Companies that install overhead garage doors may be a source of used pipe for mounting nest boxes. They may be glad to recycle it with your help.
- ▲ An interesting enticement to inspect your boxes by would-be tenants is the use of Attraction Spots: 1-1/2" flat black round spots painted on either side of the box. From a distance the spot may look like a cavity to a bird seeking accommodations. At least some woodpeckers find them interesting enough to neatly carve out a new side opening. First use on Don Yoder's boxes increased production 37%. They have been tried before, but the idea came to us from NABS IL Director Marcy Hoepfner; we hope to give credit where credit is
- ► Bluebirds are inquisitive creatures—downright nosy at

- times. WATCH FOR OPEN ENDS of pipe, either horizontal or vertical, in which BIRDS might become entrapped and unable to escape. Ask owners to cover all such open pipes with netting or screen wire.
- ▶ FRED LESAN, Biggs, Butte County, has been building nest boxes for years; supplying schools up and down No. CA in exchange for contributions to Shriner's Hospitals. He asks recipients of the boxes to save salvaged lumber for him. He kindly sent us a woodpecker deterrent for the front of the box: a piece of 1/4" hardware cloth with a square hole in the center, to fit around the box opening. Any woodpecker working on that will shortly need false teeth.

We need your nest box reports for 1995 between <u>September 15</u> and <u>September 30</u> (form enclosed) 'Everybody' should have fledged by then. We will summarize all reports for our Program totals, and forward them to NABS for enhancing the SIALIA figures. Let them hear from CA! (They had only 11 reports from the Western region in 1993).

- ▼ERRATA: Perhaps we can blame the printer for omitting 'dry' (wall) from our description of screws to be used in box construction- in the first issue.
- ▲THANKS...We certainly erred in the first Newsletter for having omitted the name of another early

- nest builder: **Glenn Corlew**, who computerized our Page 1 letterhead and logo. Sorry, Glenn, and thanks.
- ◆So far we have found only one 'birdy' environment license plate. DON WOLFF, Coordinator for San Francisco County, and his wife Joanie, travel behind OWAISSA (and no doubt in front of it too), the Indian word for bluebird. It's from the Konkapot tribe in New England. Joanie brought the name from a camp she attended as a youngster in the Berkshire Mts. She has been a NABS member for years. We would like to hear from the several 'bluebird' plates out there—someplace. Don Yoder just obtained SIALIA1. Who has 2?
- Fall is a good time to do some planting of bushes or trees that will seasonally provide over-wintering berry food for cold weather resident birds. Your climate zone will dictate which varieties will thrive or survive. Check with your local nurseryman, or SUNSET New Western Garden Book Second Printing April 1967 Pg. 132, or Third Printing April 1979, Pg. 126, for Plants that Attract Birds—or other planting guides. Plant a bush—Feed a Friend!
- Next issue we'll try to answer a request for listing of Books and Videos having to do with bluebirds, other Cavity Nesters, Trails, etc. In the meantime, try your local Wild Bird store, Nature Company, or others of those fascinating outlets supplying your needs.

More BITS & PIECES on page 11

## Do the Bluebirds Need a Recovery Program?

continued from Page 1

Service and long before that the U.S. Biological Survey, and is now the National Biological Service (NBS), headquartered at Patuxent Environment Science Center in Laurel, Maryland just outside Washington, DC. He told me to call Sam Droege, Data Analysis Leader at NBS.

I hit it lucky. Sam was in his office, answering his phone. He listened to my question then asked me if I was on Internet. I gave him my

excuses modem blew out my phone line, I never

replaced it—someday... Well, he had his computer up, the CBC (Christmas Bird Count) was on their own system. He read me the information which wasn't all current—missing the last six years. "How about the Breeding Bird Survey?" he asked.

"Sure," I replied. He gave me a play-by-play as he went into the Internet: now he was on the World Wide Web—here's ornithology—population dynamics, bird censuses—U.S.—Breeding Bird Survey. Don't quote me on the routine.

"Okay, here's what we have for Western Bluebird—total population—1966 to 1994: minus 0.7 percent per year - but that's not significant: the Mountain Bluebird samples were too small to be significant. Now here are the breakdowns for 1980 to 1994: total Western Bluebirds: minus 1.6 per year significant; Western

Bluebirds in California—minus 1.9 percent per year significant." Sam concluded by giving me names and numbers of others who might provide more assistance. I thanked him and told him it was nice to call a government agency and get such immediate help and information. "That's what we're here for." Sam replied.

So, now, what have we got? These small percentages don't sound like much—but wait—that's Per Year.

95% confidence level, a statistical measure, was -2.8% to +0.2%— very tight if I remember anything about statistics and any error was more likely a greater decline than less.

"So," I repeated, "tell me about the BBS."

Here's what he told me. The survey is nationwide. There are about 220 randomly selected survey routes in California. Each route runs for 24.5 miles along

> roads. The samples are taken in the early morning at half-

mile intervals resulting in 50 stops per survey route. At the half-mile stop, a highly trained birder observes and listens for exactly 3 minutes, recording every bird seen or heard within a quarter-mile radius. The routes are run once each year in June. Based on the statistical plan of the surveys, the BBS should provide accurate trend data provided enough of the target species is encountered. The Western Bluebird has been counted enough to be statistically significant, the Mountain Bluebird has not.

Do we need a "recovery" program? The Western Bluebird has declined 36.4% in the last 28 years and 28.5% in the last 15. The decline is accelerating. The answer is yes, we do. Let's get with it, folks!

Y 4 4 4

# The 95% confidence level, a statistical measure, was very tight if I remember anything about statistics.

Let's see, 1.9% per year for 15 years is 28.5% in a decade and half, unless my Pentium chip is acting up. Now the 1.3% doesn't seem like as much, but since 1966 that would be 39% decline!

Am I really interpreting this right? And what is the Breeding Bird Survey? The next morning, I called one of the numbers Sam had given me—Bruce Peterjohn, Breeding Bird Survey, NBS.

After telling himabout my call to Sam, I asked, "Just what is the BBS?"

"Well, first, let's make sure we're talking about the same statistics." Bruce soon confirmed that Sam's data was correct except that the BBS was established in 1966 but didn't get started in California until 1968, so the decline was 1.3% per year for 28 rather than 30 years—same decline per year though. How accurate? Bruce told me the

## **Targeting Native Species**

continued from Page 1

trees and posts, and, of course in nest boxes. Donald and Lillian Stokes have written a useful guide to building nest boxes (The Complete Birdhouse Book, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, about \$9.95 + 10%). The Stokes provide plans and dimensions for a wide variety of boxes designated for particular bird

species. In the case of bluebird boxes, the size of the entry hole is critical to their selection of

nesting spots. Just as critically, entry hole size serves to discourage other, larger species from bullying the bluebirds out of their home.

Each bluebird box provides a floor area 5 inches by 5 inches, and is 12 inches tall. Into the front of the box is a hole drilled 1 1/2 inches in diameter. (The Stokes call for an entry hole 1 9/16 inch diameter. In order to deter other species, especially House Sparrows, use the smallest hole you can get away with: even 1/16 inch can make a difference). Wire tacked to the back of the box serves to hang them from tree trunks. DO NOT place a perch below the hole: bluebirds don't need them to gain entry, and a perch makes it easier for other species to squeeze through the hole.

I made my boxes out of dog-eared cedar fence board. These are about five inches wide, so box walls, floor, and roof need only be cut to length. A single six-foot length (less than \$2) of 1/2 inch thick plank makes one nest box. The wood does not have to be treated (in fact, fresh varnish or paint may irritate the birds). I recommend using

galvanized screws to secure the box components, since these don't rust (drywall screws work fine). The end product is at the same time attractive in a rustic way, and unobtrusive when secured to a tree (or post, etc.). Of course, you can get as fancy as you like, so long as you bear in mind that entry hole

Of course, you can get as fancy as you like, so long as you bear in mind that entry hole size is critical in the minds of the birds you are trying to attract.

size is critical in the minds of the birds you are trying to attract.

When I first decided to lure the bluebirds into nesting, I built five of these boxes, in order to spread them over my property to cover the range of possible nest preferences. I placed them at different heights, and offered differing degrees of 'privacy.' Ironically, the very first one I put up was being inspected by a bluebird pair before I finished installing the fifth! This first box, about six feet off of the ground overlooking mowed pasture, has housed no less than 20 fledglings over three mating seasons. The box is about 100 feet from my back porch, and so I am provided with an unobstructed view of the parents hunting, feeding, and eventually leading the fledglings outside for their first flight. For my purposes, the bluebirds could not have chosen a better box. The other boxes have also each been occupied, variously by House Wrens, Plain Titmice, Ash-throated Flycatchers, and another pair of bluebirds, so birding in my own yard has been enhanced overall.

Putting up bird boxes to improve one's enjoyment of the local avifauna is, of course, nothing new. What I suggest, however, is that you can take an active hand in encouraging certain target species to take up residence, at least seasonally. All that is required is a little knowledge of particular nest

box preferences for particular target species. I have dealt here with Western

Bluebirds, but the principle applies to any number of target species. I have mentioned the guidelines set forth in The Complete Birdhouse Book, but other sources surely exist; and experience with your own target species and in your own backyard will probably suggest variations. I emphasize that it is important to discourage other, more gregarious species from pirating nest boxes. If necessary, boxes should be taken down seasonally and installed only when the target species arrives. A little homework on the seasonal habits of target species can go a long way here, as can your own observations regarding arrival times and the onset of nesting behavior for particular species.

We are all abundantly aware of the ecological challenges faced by many bird species, including habitat loss and competition with more gregarious species. Perhaps it's time we took the small but important step toward constructing habitat and encouraging native species to nest where they belong.



## COUNTY COORDINATORS: PRESENT AND FUTURE

by Bob Barnes & Don Yoder

The California Bluebird Recovery Program would like to have one, or more, County Coordinators for each California county. Since the start-up of our Program, 23 people have graciously volunteered to be County Coordinators in 21 counties. With 58 counties in California, there are lots of opportunities left to work as a County Coordinator for local bluebird lovers needing help, encouragement or advice. We are anxious to send you a County Coordinators Kit. We know you are probably already doing all that could be asked of such leaders. Yet, little else could be simpler, or provide so much pleasure—and help to bluebirds. If you would like to volunteer, contact **Don Yoder**. He will send you a County Coordinator's Kit to start.

Thanks to the following people who have already volunteered:

#### Calaveras County:

La Verne Hagel 466 Thompson Lane Copperopolis, CA 95228 (209) 785-2363

#### **Contra Costa County:**

Shirley & Warren Engstrom 232 Tharp Drive Moraga, CA 94556 (510) 376-4695

#### El Dorado County:

Viola A. Sampert 5655 Hollow Lane Greenwood, CA 95635 (916) 333-0318

#### El Dorado/Amador County

Hatch Graham P.O. Box 39 Somerset, CA 95684 (916) 621-1833

#### **Kern County:**

John Boice P.O. Box 126 Bodfish, CA 93205 (619) 379-8295

#### **Lassen County:**

Edward Bertotti 470 413 Wingfield Susanville, CA 96130

#### Los Angeles County:

Doug Martin 13066 Shenley Street Sylmar, CA 91342 (818) 367-8967

#### **Marin County:**

Ruth Beckner 15 Portola Avenue San Rafael, CA 94903

#### Mariposa County:

Lawrence Punte 9443 Banderilla Drive La Grange, CA 95329 (209) 852-2559

#### **Modoc County:**

Charles Welch P.O. Box 825 Alturas, CA 96101 (916) 233-4534

#### Napa County:

Andy & Lee Angel P.O. Box 48 St. Helena, CA 94574 (707) 963-9153

#### **Nevada County:**

Lorry Hukill 15954 Wolf Mountain Road Grass Valley, CA 95949 (916) 477-7165

#### **Orange County:**

Dick Purvis 936 S. Siet Place Anaheim, CA 92806

#### **Placer County:**

Lesa Chan 9720 Oak Leaf Way Granite Bay, CA 95746 (916) 791-4529

#### Sacramento County:

Stephen Coffman 7145 Sunset Avenue Fair Oaks, CA 95628 (916) 967-2055

#### San Diego County:

Rosemary Fey
Box 1245
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
(619) 767-5810

#### San Francisco County:

Don Wolff 1376 6th Avenue San Francisco, CA 94122 (415) 665-6938

#### San Joaquin County:

Thomas C. Hoffman 10122 E. Woodbridge Road Acampo, CA 95220 (209) 369-8578

#### Santa Clara County:

Jayne DiCandio Santa Clara Valley A.S. 22221 McClellan Road Cupertino, CA 95014 (408) 252-3747

#### Siskiyou County:

Elizabeth Crispin 5524 Woodside Drive Mt. Shasta, CA 94565

#### **Tulare County:**

Peter C. Morrison, M.D. 325 So. Willis Visalia, CA 93291

# **Bluebird Exchange**

CBRP Director, Don Yoder, maintains membership in four established State bluebird groups, each of whom publishes very helpful bulletins bulging with learned and shared information. Likewise, our California newsletter is sent to them.

To help our readers form connections with state and regional bluebird organizations, the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) board has requested that the addresses of those groups supplying material to "Bluebird Exchange" be published annually. Names and addresses following are those groups which were included in the feature in 1994.

If your bluebird organization publishes a newsletter and it is not included in "Bluebird Exchange", please make sure the CBRP editor or NABS is on the mailing list. For a complete list of all bluebird groups, consult *North America and Bermuda Bluebird Trail Directory*, a cooperative project of Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd. and the North American Bluebird Society published October 1993. The following list was taken from the Spring 1995 issue of NABS Sialia.

#### **ALBERTA**

Calgary Area Bluebird Trails c/o Don Stiles 20 Lake Wapta Rise SE Calgary, Alberta T2J 2M9

Ellis Bird Farm, Ltd. Box 2980 Lacambe, Alberta TOC 1S0

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Group 1831 -20th Ave., South Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 1G3

#### **BERMUDA**

Bermuda Bluebird and Longtail Society c/o Tommy Outerbridge Box HS23, Harrington Sound Bermuda, HSBX

#### **GEORGIA**

Bluebirds over Georgia, Inc. P.O. Box 53344 Atlanta, GA 30355

#### **IOWA**

Johnson County Songbird Project 2511 Hwy 1 SW Iowa City, IA 52240

#### MAINE

Bluebird Association of Maine RFD 4, Box 7600 Gardiner, ME 04345

#### **MINNESOTA**

Bluebird Recovery Program Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis Box 3801 Minneapolis, MN 55403

#### **MONTANA**

Mountain Bluebird Trails Box 794 Ronan, MT 59864

#### **NEBRASKA**

Bluebirds Across Nebraska P.O. Box 67157 Lincoln, NE 68506-7157

#### NEW YORK

Broome County Nestbox Network c/o Joseph R. Sedlacek 28 Farr Avenue Johnson City, NY 13790

New York State Bluebird Society c/o David Smith, Treasurer 15 Bridle Lane Dryden Lane, NY 13053

Schoharie County Bluebird Society c/o Kevin Berner SUNY Cobleskill, NY 12043

#### NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Bluebird Society Box 4191 Greensboro, NC 27404

#### NORTH DAKOTA

Bluebird Recovery Project North Dakota Nongame Wildlife Program 100 North Bismarck Expressway Bismarck, ND 58501

#### оню

Ohio Bluebird Society 20680 Twp. Rd. 120 Senecaville, OH 43780

#### **OKLAHOMA**

Oklahoma Nongame Wildlife Program Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation 1801 N. Lincoln Oklahoma City, OK 73105

#### **ONTARIO**

Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society 2-165 Green Valley Drive Kitchener, Ontario N2P 1K3

Willow Beach Field Naturalists c/o Hazel Bird Box 45 Harwood, Ontario K0K 2H0

#### **OREGON**

Hubert Prescott Western Bluebird Recovery Project c/o Patricia Johnston 7717 S.W. 50th Portland, OR 97219

#### VERMONT

Bluebirds Across Vermont c/o National Audubon Society Box 9, Fiddlers Green Waitsfield, VT 05673

#### WISCONSIN

Bluebird Restoration Assoc. of Wisconsin Rt. 1, Box 137, Akron Ave. Plainfield, WI 54966

# About CBRP by Don Yoder and Bob Barnes

The goal of the California Bluebird Recovery Program is to: 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. Send us notes about your outstanding successes: experiences with cavity nesters, problems on the trail, solutions. Let us hear from you. We will use as many dandy ideas and reports as space permits. We intend this to be an ongoing, self-sustaining enterprise. Also, it perfectly fills a niche in Audubon's "Birds in the Balance" program to "keep common birds common".

#### The National Audubon

**Society** (NAS) has 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 have newsletters, monthly programs, and field trips to local areas of interest.

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

The North American
Bluebird Society (NABS) is a
non-profit organization determined
to increase the populations of
Eastern Bluebirds, Western
Bluebirds, and Mountain Bluebirds
on this continent.

NABS 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.

## **\$\$ Money Matters \$\$**

The California Bluebird Recovery Program is designed to be selfsupporting. Bob Barnes' 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. Support staff time is covered by the National Audubon Society. Don Yoder is retired and his time is entirely voluntary. We are depending on you to make donations to cover out-of-pocket expenses (printing, postage, Don's phone).

For new subscribers to receive four issues of the CBRP Newsletter, we are requesting a minimum donation of \$5.00. Donations of any amount over \$5.00 will help cover expenses of getting the word out to a wider audience.

If you would like a copy of the last newsletter, send a self-addressed stamped (\$0.32) envelope to: CBRP Newsletter, 555 Audubon Place, Sacramento, CA, 95825.

## Membership

Being a member of the National Audubon Society (NAS) or North American Bluebird Society (NABS) is not required to participate in the California Bluebird Recovery Program. If you are already a member of NAS, NABS, or both, thank you. If you are not, we hope that you will consider membership.

Membership in the National Audubon Society is \$20.00 for newcomers, and includes 6 issues of Audubon Magazine and contact with a local chapter. Please send membership requests to:

Bob Barnes National Audubon Society 555 Audubon Place Sacramento, CA 95825

A Regular Membership in the North American Bluebird Society is \$15.00. Membership includes the quarterly journal SIALIA. Please send membership requests to:

Don Yoder North American Bluebird Society 2021 Ptarmigan Drive, #1 Walnut Creek, CA 94595

# Reader's Forum

The Reader's Forum is meant to be interactive...involving all CBRP Newsletter readers. Many of the Reader's Forum letters ask for advice. Don't be shy! Give us your written responses to questions asked and we'll print them in future newsletter issues. Don't worry, Don Yoder answers all of these letters in a timely manner. But, let's get the discussion going among all of us. Even the "experts" are always learning from others.

#### ◆From Bill Rihn, Coarsegold:

For future issues of the CBRP newsletter you might consider including information on location, installation, and mounting of bluebird houses. Editors' note: We agree with you Bill. We are hopeful you will agree that some of the articles in this newsletter provide a good start.

#### ▼From Gail Wynn, Descanso:

I am very interested in any information on or activities involving a California Bluebird Recovery Program. I live 40 miles east of San Diego, 3,200 ft. at the base of Cuyamaca Peak and the lower slopes of the Cuyamaca Mountains. I have put up blue bird boxes on fence posts for the past 9 years and have had 1-3 pairs of Western Bluebirds nesting every year and usually broods fledging successfully. My 20 acres is primarily chaparral, oak-woodland with some open spaces -not prime bluebird habitat, but neighboring areas are and I would like to get residents in the area interested in putting up (and monitoring) boxes. I'm also involved in the Purple Martin Conservation Association though the martins prefer holes in the oaks to the gourds I put up. Thank you for adding me to your mailing list and keep me posted of information and participants.

► From Molly Hill, Summerland:

I am interested in the California Bluebird Recovery Program. I hope to begin a project to establish a number of bluebird nesting boxes on a ranch in Santa Barbara County, California. This is a 14,000 acre private, coastal ranch which includes a variety of habitats which I believe would be appropriate for such a project.

I am a 10th grade student at Carpinteria High School (in Santa Barbara County). I would be assisted by my father.

Any information you could supply regarding placement, spacing, time of year, census taking, etc., would be greatly appreciated. Thank you!

#### ▶ From Lucie Clark, Vista

We note from a recent number of the Buena Vista Audubon Society Lagoon Flyer that a bluebird recovery program is now being conducted in California. The Friends of Wilderness Gardens Preserve have been active for over five years in trying to encourage bluebird nesting on the Preserve by putting up nesting boxes. Design of the boxes was chosen to adhere to accepted criteria, and regular cleaning out of unused boxes was carried out. To date, we have no records of successful nesting. We have recently been informed that bluebirds do not nest at elevations less than 1500'. (Wilderness Gardens Preserve consists of

approximately 700 acres of riparian woodland, oak woodland, coastal sage scrub and chaparral along the San Luis Rey River between Pauma Valley and Pala, at an elevation of between 1000' and 1200'.)

We would appreciate any suggestions you might have on the advisability of continuing this project, and/or ways to improve its chances for success.

#### ► From Mindy Budin, Santa Barbara:

I'm interested in volunteering for your "Birds in the Balance" campaign, particularly the California Bluebird Recovery Program. I think they are beautiful, graceful birds. I located a good area in a nearby school and hope to put up 2 nestboxes. Any information on placement would be appreciated. Although I'm limited on driving distance and physical activities, I enjoy phone work and would like to help in an way possible. Please tell me about your program.

#### Y 4 4 4

Thanks to Hatch Graham and Bud Hoekstra for several excellent suggestions for improving the newsletter. Some have been implemented in this issue. More will follow in future issues. Keep those helpful suggestions coming. Artwork, graphs, charts, icons, and other materials are also welcome.

# Creating Bluebird Habitat in California's Vineyards

By Thomas Hoffman
San Joaquin County Coordinator

Western Bluebirds can be easily attracted to much of California's farmland that is presently planted in commercial vineyards. The birds instinctively choose areas characterized by an undulating landscape, dotted with stumps or fence posts three to five feet tall. Their preference includes sites that

practice, intended to reduce pesticide use by attracting beneficial insects, provides precisely the type of low ground cover habitat the bluebird prefers, and encourages a greater food supply.

The use of chemical insect control is one area in which the wildlife habitat needs to be considered. Harsher insecticides should be avoided if birds are to become established in a vineyard setting. In most cases, however, "soft" pesticides (i.e.: pyrethins), biological pesticides (BT), and pest specific chemicals (Omite), can be

baffle over the roof of the box, with space for air to circulate between baffle and box, is a simple way to accomplish this.

Thomas Hoffman is a commercial wine-grape grower in the wine growing district around Lodi, California. He is the current president of the Lodi District Grapegrowers Association, writes a monthly column for the San Joaquin Farm Bureau News, and is actively promoting the use of barn owls for rodent control in vineyards and orchards. Among the 100 plus bird boxes Thomas has placed across his family's property is a bluebird trail that has expanded over the last five years to include nearly 70 boxes. Finally, he has volunteered to serve as the San Joaquin County Coordinator for the California Bluebird Recovery Program. Thanks, Thomas.

# During the winter, mummified fruit hanging on the vines sustains the birds until the insects re-emerge in the spring.

have low ground cover and limited or sporadic human presence. In many regards, this description fits the setting where vines are grown in many regions of this state.

A vineyard, with its staked vines, provides locations for both hunting and escape, and, if conditions are right, the birds will establish year-round residence. During spring, summer and fall, the vineyard attracts a tremendous variety of insects, including the bluebird's favorites: grasshoppers, crickets, and small beetles. During the winter months, mummified fruit hanging on the vines in hand picked vineyards, sustains the birds until the insects re-emerge in the spring.

Current vine pest management approaches of planting insectattracting cover crops in the vine row middles greatly improves the conditions for the bluebird. This used with limited concern for the wildlife and will provide adequate, if not complete control. Chemical weed control is not a major concern for the birds, and mildew control, through a regular program with sterol inhibitors or sulfur, will not harm the birds or their young.

Nesting boxes built to fit the bluebirds specifications, are the only other modification a grower must provide to complete habitat requirements. Boxes can be placed at the ends of rows or in non-cultivated regions of the field, maintaining a distance of 100 yards between boxes.

In regions where summer daytime temperatures reach above 100 degrees F, such as in the Central Valley of California, box designs should include some type of protection from excessive solar heat since young will perish under hot conditions. Providing a sun

#### \* \* \* \* \*

### Special Thanks!!!

Thanks to the following individuals whose contributions of \$100.00, or more, have provided added asssurance that the California Bluebird Recovery Program will grow and flourish:

Contra Costa County - Mount Diablo Audubon Society; Marin County - Marin Audubon Society; Napa -David Graves; Visalia - Peter C. Morrison, M.D.

And, it is with grateful thanks the we receive a \$500.00 contribution from Mrs. Helen M. Turley of Calistoga in memory of Whitney Lawrence Turley II.

## HELP WANTED

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Sierra Foothill Research and Extension Center is looking for a volunteer(s) to maintain 100 nestboxes. The boxes were installed on the station, located about 15 miles east of Marysville in Yuba County, in 1990 for a research project. The boxes were heavily used by bluebirds, tree swallows, ash-throated flycatchers, wrens, and titmice. In 1993, the last year of the study, all 100 boxes were used with 203 nests initiated. With the research project completed, these boxes need someone to carry out the annual maintenance chores such as cleaning out the old nest materials and repairing the occasional broken box. Weekly inspections are required during the early spring to keep wasps out of the boxes. If you are interested in helping cavity-nesting birds, please contact Paul Gorenzel at UC Davis, (916) 752-2263.

#### **EXISTING TRAIL NEEDS**

HELP. In Amador County, near Ione, Plymouth, Sutter Creek or Drytown: ±50 boxes on or adjacent to Highway 124. Please contact Hatch Graham, Coordinator for El Dorado and Amador Counties (916) 621-1833.

#### HANDY PEOPLE NEEDED

to provide components for nest boxes using hammer & nail or screw assembly at the September and October Backyard Wildlife Habitat Workshops (See announcement in Calendar of Events). Of course, you will be compensated for the cost of materials.

# **Upcoming Audubon Council Meetings in California**

A special invitation is extended to California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter readers to attend any of the following meetings. You need not be an Audubon member to attend. Come and share your experiences in attracting bluebirds and other wildlife species to your yard.

September 23 & 24, 1995 -Northern California Council, Backyard Wildlife Habitat Development Workshop, "south barn," Anderson Marsh (Clear Lake) State Historical Park, Lake County. Hosted by Redbud Audubon Society.

October 21 & 22, 1995 - Central California Council, Backyard Wildlife Habitat Development Workshop, Old Masonic Hall, Mariposa, Mariposa County. Hosted by Yosemite Area Audubon Society.

The centerpiece of the above gatherings will be a comprehensive workshop on developing backyard wildlife habitat. Jesse Grantham, Audubon's backyard wildlife habitat expert, and Don Yoder, California Bluebird Recovery Program Director, will be joined by several volunteers and resource people from throughout California who have information on and experience with backyard wildlife habitat projects. There will be field trips, presentations, and sharing by participants. Don and Jesse will answer questions about the many aspects of attracting birds and providing nest boxes for birds. We plan to assemble nest boxes or bird

feeders to take home from the meeting.

November 4, 1995 - Southern California Council, Laguna Hills, hosted by Laguna Hills Audubon. Technology theme (word processing programs, newsletters, internet, software, and more).

November 18 & 19, 1995 - Central Coast Council, Lompoc, hosted by La Purisima Audubon Society. Ecotourism/Central Coast Birding Trail theme.

Contact Bob Barnes at Audubon's Western Regional Office (916-481-5332) for agendas or further information.

## Bluebirds and Bluebirders Lose Treasured Friends

Lawrence Zeleny, founder of the North American Bluebird Society, died at this home in University Park, Maryland, on May 27, 1995, following a heart attack. His loss, together with the recent passing of John Findlay III in Alabama, marks a milestone in the support given to restoration of bluebird habitat throughout North America. The California Bluebird Recovery Program will be ever conscious of their unsurpassed contributions as we strive to carry on the programs they started.

Memorials to Lawrence Zeleny may be made to: The Lawrence Zeleny Memorial Fund, NABS, Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295.

# **More Bits & Pieces**

entinued from Page 2

- AVAILABLE FOR TEACHERS and others offering Nature subjects: The NABS Educational Package "Getting to Know Bluebirds" is an introduction to cavity nesters, especially bluebirds, why they have a survival problem, and how people can help. Available from NABS, P. O. Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20916-6295. \$5.95. Suggest you send an extra \$1.25 for first class mailing. (Contains an excellent Plantings list).
- ◆ CONTINUING EDUCATION ON THE TRAIL. Experimental trails using varied styles of nest boxes may prove both interesting and valuable. Try 2 different box styles, paired in close proximity, to learn the reference for a particular style. We read "It isn't the box—it's the location". So given a good location, the most-used box design could even lead you to change your construction program. Let us know whether you detect some differences.
- ▶ Our thanks to BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST for their mention of our program in the May/ June 1995 issue: *Quick Takes*, pg. 18. Now we're known east of the Continental Divide.
- According to President BILL RIHN, Yosemite Audubon Society has an interesting joint venture going on between the chapter and a local organization, SPICE (Seniors Participating in Community Education). Member JOHN RIGHT has designed and built bluebird houses, and he and other

seniors have cut out parts for

bluebird houses. Students can then

buy the houses assembled (\$12) or ready-to-assemble (\$7). The Audubon chapter has contributed some money and coordination for these efforts. While the project started in Oakhurst (Eastern Madera County) the chapter is in the process of doing it in Mariposa (different school district, but they also have a SPICE program.)

**▶**GETTING READY FOR COLD WEATHER. 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. Consider 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. 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

Don Yoder, Program Director 2021 Ptarmigan Drive, #1 Walnut Creek, CA 94595 (510) 937-5974

Bob Barnes, Program Coordinator Sheila Green, Associate Editor Cyndi Edinger, Production Asst. April Riske, Production Asst. National Audubon Society 555 Audubon Place Sacramento, CA 95825 (916) 481-5332 FAX: (916) 481-6228

## **NEW MEMBERS**

California: Acampo - Thomas Hoffman; Agoura - Sandra Pesak; Alamo - Brian Thiessen; Alpine - Charles Stout; Alturas -Charles Welch; Anaheim - Richard Purvis; Bakersfield - David Evans, Kern Audubon Society, Mary Griffin; Bishop - Eastern Sierra Audubon Society; Bodfish - John Boice; Canyondam - Donna Scott; Coarsegold - Mr. and Mrs. Robert Potts; Concord - Rick Riefer; Copperopolis -Laverne Hagel; Corona Del Mar - Lola Benson; Cupertino - Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society; Danville - Mt. Diablo Audubon Society; Descanso - Gail Wynn; El Cajon - Carolyn Buck; Forest Falls -Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Cox; Granite Bay -Lesa Chan; Grass Valley - Lorry Hukill; Sierra Foothills Audubon Society; Greenbrae - Howard Oser; Greenwood -Viola Sampert; Kentfield - Marvin Siperstein; La Jolla - Prudence Wood; Daniel Brimm; Lafayette - Eartha Newsong; Lakeview - Susan Nash; Lakeside - Barbara Coblentz; Martinez -Kathleen Grimoldi; Marysville - Dale Whitmore; Mill Valley - Marin Audubon Society; Moraga - Warren Engstrom; Modesto - Jerome Lommel; Mount Hermon - Jennifer Freeman; Murphys -Mary Mollett; Napa - David Graves; Oakland - Pat McGinnis; Oregon House -Anita Peacemaker; Orinda - Jan Rayl; Palo Alto - Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton, Pine Mountain - Donald Johnson; Pleasant Hill - Joy Hill; Porterville - Jim Ver Steeg; Portola Valley - James and Joan Boyce; San Francisco - Donald Wolff; San Rafael - Donald Schuster; Somerset - Mr. and Mrs. Hatch Graham; South Pasadena -Elisabeth Zall; Tehachapi - Charles McCullough; Tujunga - William Graham; Tustin - James Cox; Ukiah - Mr. and Mrs. King; Visalia - Peter Morrison; Walnut Creek - Alice Blazick, Burt Bream, Arnold Buss, Mr. and Mrs. Crane, Monte Edelen, Mark Elledge, Elsie Falconer, Donald Hay, M.D., Bob Hill, Bert Horberg, Lester Katsura, Franklin Knapp, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Marten, Don and Ruby Moal, Marion Nagy, Harris Stone; Woodside - Howard Rathlesberger; Illinois: Saybrook - Donald Gibbens; Minnesota: Minneapolis - Dorene Scriven; Nebraska: Raymond - Steve Eno; Oregon: Klamath Falls - Laura Jertberg; Washington: Spokane -Rosemary Jones

# **Coordinator News**

TOM HOFFMAN, San Joaquin County... 'I have felt this (bluebird progam) is exactly what we bluebirders in California need to pull us toward a more concentrated effort at re-establishing habitat across the state... What is being done here in California is either simply not enough to talk about or is not getting the recognition that it should." Exactly what we've been saying for years, Tom. Considerable is being done, but we'd like a lot more to talk about.

JOHN BOICE, Kern County... has a nest box trail on Nature Conservancy land. Recently he was written about in a nice article in the *Kern Valley Sun*. Also, John says he has a NABS slide program with sound that he'd be willing to present to any group. And that's spreading the word about bluebirds.

DICK PURVIS, Orange County..."It is good to know that there are other bluebirders in California. I have been putting out boxes for about fifteen years now and thought that I was all alone".

VIOLA SAMPERT and HATCH GRAHAM, Co-Coordinators, El Dorado County...Much is being accomplished with artwork, records and reporting forms for our use throughout our Program. In addition, Hatch has produced business cards for all current Coordinators. And all this while actively managing several sizable bluebird trails.

LESA CHAN, Placer County... Actively spreading the word about our Program, Lesa had a table and displays for the 25th Earth Day celebration on April 22. She had a Bluebird Program banner made for use with the display. Contact Lesa if you would like to use the banner for your Bluebird Program promotion events. Lesa, also active in promoting restoration of oak trees, distributed information on the subject, supplied by the University of California Integrated Hardwood Range Program. That's what we call planning habitat for the future. Super!

National Audubon Society 555 Audubon Place Sacramento, CA (916) 481-5332 Nonprofit Org. U.S. Postage PAID Sacramento, CA Permit 910

#### **Upcoming Events:**

#### September

15 Bluebird Reports Due

23-24 Backyard Wildlife Habitat Workshop, Clear Lake

30 Bluebird Report Deadline

#### October

21-22 Backyard Wildlife Habitat Workshop, Mariposa

#### November

4 Southern California Audubon Council meeting, Laguna Hills M/M Hatch Graham P.O.Box 39 Somerset CA 95684