



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
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1995 Nesting Successes by Don Yoder

The Nesting Season has ended for 1995, in all of the territory covered by the California Bluebird Recovery Program. The reports at hand indicate that participants have made a very sizable impact on the populations of Bluebirds, and other species as well.

Over 60 Annual Nest Box Reports have been received, certainly representing far more separate trails reported than ever

available. We know there are even more who, unfortunately, did not send in their reports, and still more whom we have not been able to contact.

Two of the earliest stated goals in proposing a California program were to get more people involved, and to produce more Bluebirds. Had we started with a contest, Honors for 1995 would easily go to the following:

different parks, golf courses and cemeteries — a gratifying increase of 40% over 1994. Dick also reports 162 Wood Ducks fledged, and 5 Western Bluebirds from a Wood Duck Box!!

For the County furnishing the greatest number of separate trail reports: El Dorado County Co-ordinators **Viola Sampert** and **Hatch Graham**. Their joint efforts—supplying boxes, contacting many new people, staying in touch, and following up for submission of Annual Reports—produced 56% of the total reports received.

And a 250% increase in fledglings over 1994 is reported by Placer County Coordinator **Lesia Chan**—a most satisfying accomplishment.

CONGRATULATIONS to each of these record setters—challenges for next year to all who love those gorgeous Blues around us.

Now comes our task of summarizing the statewide figures contained in each report. That should produce some interesting data. Completion is underway even as you read this. More later.

Trail operators can take great satisfaction that the results of overseeing their trails are collectively so effective.

before from California. Trail operators can take great pride in these achievements, and satisfaction that the results of overseeing their trails are collectively so effective. Nest Box reports were received from 15 Counties—over one-fourth of the State's total!

The fact that a few operators had disappointing results in numbers of nesting attempts or fledglings does not detract from the attention given throughout the season to having boxes maintained and 'for rent'. We wanted to know just how many birders are attempting to make housing

For the greatest number of Western Bluebirds fledged: **Dick Purvis**, Coordinator in Orange County, who reports 704 fledglings from 263 boxes located on 28

In This Issue:

Bits & Pieces	Page 2
Bluebird Resources	Page 3
Leave the Old Nests?	Page 3
County Coordinators	Page 4
About CBRP	Page 5
Upcoming Events	Page 6
Nestbox Report Form	insert
Western Nestbox Specs	insert
Blazing a Bluebird Trail	insert

Bits & Pieces

▼If you are still mulling over how to make a 1-9/16" hole, consider this: **Fred Lesan** in Butte County uses a Hole Saw, which he purchases from shops that sharpen saws. They cost around \$8.00 and can be sharpened. Sounds like a winner. We know Fred has been building boxes for years, many of them to benefit Shriner's Hospitals. Thanks, Fred, for the added suggestion.

▲COMMENTS pertaining to nesting failures were made by several reporters, some indicating that box placement too late in the spring probably resulted in non-use, even though Bluebirds had been seen in the area earlier. We suggest having boxes hung in January or February, for possible overnight roosting use, and to be available when the urge to nest first strikes.

▼**Suzanne McDonald** in Lassen County reports problems with overzealous Tree Swallows, livestock smashing hardware cloth guards, and probably Wrens ("an egg pierced"). (Things can be tough at 5200 ft. elev.) She had boxes paired. One answer may be (if not already so) to place boxes back-to-back on the same support. Swallows may not allow Swallow neighbors THAT close. Livestock are notorious as back scratchers on any handy protrusion. Box placement on the other side of the post, or parallel with the fence line, may give some relief. Boxes on free-standing posts in pastures might succeed if the posts are deeply set and wrapped with barbed wire.

▲Some very unexpected causes can lead to brood failures—e.g.: **Donald L. Johnson** in Kern County lost 2 broods to vandalism and nearby "helicopter landings".

▼In Tuolumne County, **Tom Rickman** is well into a program with CalTrans to hang nest boxes on highway signs. We'll find out more about just how busy are the roads on which this is taking place. There certainly should be no shortage of posts.

▼How can you say there aren't benefits to be derived from Bluebirding, other than having more birds around? Certain personal benefits can be demonstrated as well. We quote from a letter from **Monty Loyd** in Fresno County: "A great side effect of all this is that I have been getting much needed exercise that I have needed for my high blood pressure and heart arrhythmia from which I suffer. I have had only one bout of the arrhythmia since starting this project and am currently reducing my blood pressure medicine". We wish good health to all Bluebirders, everywhere.

▲**Lorry Hukill**, Nevada County Coordinator, included in her Annual Nest Box Report "There were 2 females who fought over the box for 2 or 3 days. They even rolled in the dirt and bushes in vicious combat". Quite a demonstration that there is, indeed, a critical housing shortage.

▼Not satisfied with the number of reports already being generated from El Dorado County, **Hatch**

Graham, Co-Coordinator in El Dorado County, vows that in 1996 he will initiate reports on 1,000 boxes in the County. Now, won't that be something?

▲PLANTING to produce wild berry/seed crops for winter feeding can be prized by over-wintering Bluebirds. Check your local Nursery for suggestions on native varieties that will do well in your area. Climate, soils and precipitation all must be considered. Some of the following may be adaptable—only a few as space allows:

Western dogwood (*cornus nuttallii*)

Toyon (*heteromeles arbutifolia*)

Pacific wax myrtle (*myrica californica*)

Catalina Cherry (*prunus lyonii*)

Coffeberry (*rhamnus californica*)

Golden current (*ribes species*)

California wild rose (*rosa californica*)

California blackberry (*rubus vitifolios/ursinus*)

Mexican elderberry (*sambucus mexicana*)

California wild grape (*vitis californica*)

The above list was compiled by Jesse Grantham, Audubon Western Sanctuaries Director, 555 Audubon Place, Sacramento, CA 95825.



The California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter is published quarterly by the National Audubon Society, 555 Audubon Place, Sacramento, CA 95825. Subscription is \$5.00 per year.

RESOURCES for Getting to Know your Bluebirds Better

VIDEOS

- **BLUEBIRDS UP CLOSE**
National Audubon Society
50 Minutes \$29.95
- **JEWELS OF BLUE***
30 Minutes \$24.95
- **BACKYARD BLUES***
47 Minutes \$29.95
- **BLUEBIRD TRAILS***
38 Minutes \$24.95

*If not found locally, the last 3 may be secured from: Birds Eye Productions, 1761 County Road H, Deer Park, WI 54007. Add \$2.00 per tape Shipping & Handling.

BOOKS

- **BLUEBIRDS FOREVER** by Connie Toops.
128 pages in hardcover and 120 color photos. Voyageur Press. Highly rated.
- **BLUEBIRD TRAILS "A Guide to Success"** by Dorene H. Scriven. 253 pages paperback. 61 color photos & 27 b&w. Full of information on trail management.
- **BRING BACK THE BLUEBIRDS** by Andrew M. Troyer.

If you know of any other resources about bluebirds, please write and let us know. We can compile a list and publish it annually. Reviews are especially welcome.

MAGAZINES

- **WILDBIRD**
Occasionally has information about bluebirds, and has a regular March feature scheduled. Send inquiries to: Wildbird Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 52898, Boulder, CO 80322-2898.
Subscriptions are \$23.97/1 year, \$38.00/2 years.
- **BIRDS AND BLOOMS**
Good backyard birding (and gardening) resource. Send inquiries to: P.O. Box 5359, Harlan, IA 51539.
Subscriptions are \$16.95/1 year, \$29.00/2 years.

Leave the Old Nests?

*taken from the Bird Watcher's Digest Skimmer, Dec. 1994.
Submitted by John L. Baker.*

Every Autumn, thousands of people clean out their bluebird boxes, getting them ready for the spring nesting season. This practice has been widely encouraged because it reportedly reduces parasites, especially blowfly larvae. Recent studies suggest that blowflies present less of a problem than originally thought. The argument has been made that chemicals used to control parasites in boxes should be avoided because the chemicals may be a greater problem for bluebird chicks than the parasites. A new study ("Eastern Bluebirds Prefer Boxes Containing Old Nests," by Wayne Davis, Paul Kalisz, and Rick Wells, *Journal of Field Ornithology*, 65:250-253) reports

that when given a choice, Eastern bluebirds overwhelmingly select boxes containing old nests. The authors erected 50 pairs of boxes in prime bluebird habitat in Kentucky. In each case, there was one box containing an old nest and one box that did not. In 38 out of 41 cases where one of the boxes was used, the birds chose the one with an old nest. In four cases, neither box was used.

The authors speculate that the birds chose the boxes with old nest material because even though they were likely to contain blowfly larvae, the blowflies were likely to be the victims of a parasitic wasp that lays its eggs on the larvae. In choosing boxes with old nests, the bluebirds may be reducing the risk of blowfly infestations, as well as reducing the time and energy needed to collect new material. Whatever the reason, the results

contradict the popularly held belief that good management requires that the boxes be cleaned out each year, and suggests that additional studies are needed to determine the reason for the bluebirds' preference.

Director's comment: The experiments described above are based upon some sound theories. A few local area birders have held similar views. Some experiments on your own trail may prove valuable. A possible result, however, is placing the female in easier reach of predators. Having left the old nest on the floor of the box, any new material placed above it raises the female's brooding level nearer the hole, and nearer grasping hands of raccoons, etc. Adding 1" to the depth of the box (from bottom to hole) should help reduce some of this hazard. Raccoon guards may become even more warranted. (D.Yoder)

COUNTY COORDINATORS: PRESENT AND FUTURE

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, 26 people have volunteered to be County Coordinators in 25 counties. With 58 counties in California, there are lots of opportunities left to serve as a County Coordinator for local bluebird lovers needing help, encouragement or advice. You are probably doing what would be asked of such leaders anyhow. Yet, little else could be simpler, or provide so much pleasure—and help the 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:

Alameda County
Ann Kositsky
1090 Miller Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94708
(510) 527-5091

Amador/El Dorado County
Hatch Graham
P.O. Box 39
Somerset, CA 95684
(916) 621-1833

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

Kern County
John Boice
P.O. Box 126
Bodfish, CA 93205
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Lake County
Jeannette Knight
8155 Sulphur Creek Road
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Lassen County
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470 413 Wingfield
Susanville, CA 96130

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Madera County
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Coarsegold, CA 93614
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Marin County
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Marin County
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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

These people are ready, willing and able to be of assistance to anyone interested in cavity nesters. Feel free to contact them to let them know of your activities and location. Our network grows through such contacts.

About CBRP by Don Yoder and Bob Barnes

\$\$ MONEY MATTERS \$\$

Referring to Money Matters in an earlier Newsletter, someone asked: "What do I get for my subscription fee to California Bluebird Recovery Program?" Well, we can think of a couple of things—e.g., Four editions of the Newsletter, by which we intend to let Bluebirders, and others interested in helping cavity nesters, exchange ideas, raise questions, get answers, share the satisfaction of being part of a statewide venture to build awareness of others having parallel aims and goals (—and problems). Such a venture has to be self-supporting if it is to succeed. Several members have said it is worth the price of admission to know that there are others 'out there' making the same efforts as they have been making for some years.

The Newsletter is the chief means of communicating with our members. We hope to reach the stage where we might have regional get-togethers with County Coordinators conducting seminars, displays or demonstrations. Coordinators can now provide CBRP forms for your use in keeping nest box records, making annual reports; box plans of several designs, and serve as a local contact for your immediate questions and problems.

We intend to complete agreements with several Federal agencies on whose land local birders may secure willing assistance with box placements, monitoring, and location of ideal habitat. When these cooperative arrangements are completed, you will be advised through the Newsletter.

We intend to make this organization grow and succeed, as such groups have done in at least a dozen other States. If it is worth your support, we hope you will be looking for new members, and keeping up your membership for years to come. And we hope to make the Newsletter worth your interest and support so you will look forward to its arrival in your mailbox.

And remember, YOUR contributions to the Newsletter are solicited, for the exchange of ideas and information between members. Please keep those letters, questions and ideas coming.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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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.



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 co-sponsors of the California Bluebird Recovery Program with Don Yoder and the North American Bluebird Society.

Upcoming Events

17th Annual Klamath Basin Bald Eagle Conference

Feb. 16-18, 1996

Klamath Falls, OR

Celebrating our country's largest concentration of wintering bald eagles outside of Alaska.

Speakers • Workshops •

Field Trips • Banquet • Art Shows

• Films • Bald Eagle Run •

Photo Contest • and more!

Sponsored by the Klamath Basin Audubon Society. (503) 883-5732.

California Duck Days

Feb. 16-19, 1996

Davis, CA

Field Trips • Workshops • Displays

Registration: \$25/all 4 days, or just \$10/day. For more information call (800) 425-5001.

National Audubon Society Council Meetings:

Southern California Council Meeting will be held at Starr Ranch near Irvine, February 3, 1996. For more information, contact Jill Shirley (916) 481-5332.

Bay Area Council Meeting will be hosted by Mt. Diablo Audubon Society, February 3, 1996, at Richardson Bay Audubon Center. For more information, contact Al McNabney at (510) 945-1785.

Central Coast Council Meeting will be held in Ventura, March 9, 1996. The focus will be the proposed Central Coast Birding Trail. Interested persons are invited to contact Bob Barnes at (916) 481-5332.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

March 30 - April 2, 1996

Asilomar Conference Grounds
Pacific Grove, CA

The conference will have an exciting agenda that reflects Audubon's renewed commitment to birds and wildlife. Highlights include backyard wildlife and hands-on technology workshops, discussions about legislative issues, opportunities to network with other chapter people and activists, field trips, and age-appropriate programs for children and young adults.

For more information, contact the NAS California Field Office at (916) 481-4332.

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Upcoming Events:

February

3 Bay Area Audubon Council
3 Southern California Audubon
Council

10 DEADLINE for March issue
16-18 Bald Eagle Conference
16-19 California Duck Days

March

9 Central Coast Audubon Council
30-April 2 Audubon Western
Regional Conference

Hatch Graham
Coordinator C B R P
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