



# California Bluebird Recovery Program

Sponsored jointly  
by  
The National Audubon Society—California Field Office  
&  
The North American Bluebird Society

*for the encouragement and preservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere the West*

## 1996 TOPS CALIFORNIA RECORDS FOR BIRDS FLEDGED

### Annual Report Featured in This Issue

*The 2 center pages of this issue contain the 180 reports received by the end of 1996. Exactly 2,400 nestboxes were reported with a grand total of 5,077 cavity nesters fledged. Of these 3,157 were western or mountain bluebirds.*

### ANNUAL REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

*by Hatch Graham*

#### High Roller

Wow! What about **Dick Purvis**! He fledged 1,111 birds in his bluebird boxes in 1996. And another 237 in his wood duck boxes. 1,011 of Dick's little birds were bluebirds. Dick has 334 bluebird boxes hanging from the trees in cemeteries, parks, and golf courses in Orange County.

#### Productive boxes

Not everyone can match a Dick Purvis, but large contributions can come from folks with only one box. The highest average fledged per box goes to **Roy Greenaway** of Sacramento County who produced 11 fledglings from his single nestbox. **Betsy Meland**, El Dorado Co., and **Alice Pennington** (**June Schellhaus**, monitor), Placer Co., each had 9 fledglings from one box. All these were double clutches, of course.

**Jo Helling**, **Marilyn Nelson**, and **Peg Thorp**, all from Nevada County, had 8 fledglings each in their one box. We're not sure we should count **Dick Purvis'** wood ducks, which produced 7.9 babies per box; but what about **Leslie Rose** of El Dorado County who had 35 birds fledge from her 5 boxes

for an average of 7.0 per box! **Debbie Sekerak**, from Nevada County, also had 7 birds from her single box and **Dianne McCleery** from Amador County averaged 6.2 birds in 5 boxes. This rounds out the 10 monitors with the highest averages.

The second flight—11th through 20th place are as follows: from El Dorado County: **Jack Dear**, 1 box, 6 birds; **Goldhill Nursery**, 1 box, 6 birds; **George Goodwin**, 3 boxes, 5.67/box; **Georgia & Art Perkin**, 4 boxes, 5.5/box; **Jim Fletcher**, 8 boxes, 5.38/box; from Calaveras County, **Laverne Hagel**, 12 boxes, 5.08/box; then **Rachel Talbot**, Amador, and **Marge Stoffer**, Eldorado with an average of 5/box. Rachel has 5 boxes, Marge has 1. Tied for 20th place, each with 2 boxes were **Peggy & Rich Percy**, **Evelyn True**, El Dorado, and **Mary & John Zotalis**, Nevada Co., all with an average of 4.5/box.

It's pretty obvious these folks have a good home environment for the cavity nesters. Congratulations. If you're wondering, the Statewide average was 2.06/box.

## Notes from the Field & Working Trails

*by Don Yoder*

Several notes accompanied Annual Nestbox Reports arriving at the end of the 1996 nesting season. You may find them as interesting as we did.

From **Kevin Putnam**, Coordinator in Sutter County: (Kevin has 23 boxes, hopes to get to 100 in 1997): I have never seen very many Bluebirds around here during my 36 years. However, in the course of my project I've found some old timers who say there used to be large numbers of Bluebirds back in the 40's and before. These people are excited that someone is doing something to recover those populations. So am I... I found certain areas where Bluebirds are and I am going to work outwards from those places, gradually expanding the breeding populations.

In Walnut Creek, **Les Katsura**: Past two seasons I used wire net guards on 15 of my 30 houses. No species attempted to build in houses with the net guards except wrens. This year I removed the guards after first nesting but no luck. Next year I am thinking of using oversized roof as predator deterrent. Wish me luck.

In Sutter County: **June Persson** in mid-June "inherited a trail that had been put up, apparently as an Eagle Scout project but not monitored. She found that "some of the boxes... had bugs and wasps in them. Is there any spray I could use or cleaning method to get rid of them?" (Comment: Clean

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# North American Bluebird Society to Meet in CA

**First Time NABS Meets in the Golden State—Newport Beach, Orange County is the Site  
CBRP Coordinator Chairs Meeting for Host: Sea & Sage Audubon**

*By Dick Purvis & Ernest Schimmelman*

On May 15th through the 18th, the Orange County Sea and Sage chapter of Audubon is sponsoring the 20th annual meeting of the North American Bluebird Society in Newport Beach, California. Members of the California Bluebird Recovery Program are especially urged to attend. This is an opportunity to show the rest of the US that California has an effective and important bluebird program. CBRP's Orange County Coordinator **Dick Purvis** is chair of the event and asks for your help and support.

The primary purpose for hosting the event is to get out the story of "urban bluebirds." It is hoped others will get interested in putting bluebird boxes in areas which presently are very much underused like populous southern California. Other parts of California and the US rarely use these urban areas. For instance, at one national convention the field trip was almost two hours by bus out into the wilderness to see a bluebird trail. On the way a number of urban parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and schoolyards were passed which were ideal for bluebirds but no trails were there. Instead boxes were put out into wild areas where at least a few natural cavities were present. There are no natural cavities in the manmade urban areas represented here.

Orange County bluebirders have proven that birds can be enticed into these areas. From nearly zero nests fourteen years ago, nest counts have increased to about 350 in 1996 even though Orange County is one of the smallest and least likely counties in California to have bluebirds. The eastern half is dry chaparral and the western half is highly developed residential and business areas. Neither is acceptable to bluebirds. However, included in the urban areas are parks, cemeteries, and golf courses. Bluebirds have drifted down to these places during the

winter from their preferred habitat of mountain meadows. When they found nest boxes in these manmade meadows, they used them to roost in and then stayed to nest in the spring since these areas are so ideal for them all year round.

With its burgeoning population expansion and subdivisions inexorably encroaching into and destroying the natural habitat in many parts of our State, the lessons of Orange County are of immediate concern to most Californians. How can we replace what is lost for the cavity nesters? Here are some answers and tips for success.

There are severe problems in maintaining a bluebird trail in urban parks. The worst problem is vandalism. Boxes cannot be put on posts five or six feet high. They wouldn't last one day. In fact, boxes can't be any lower than about twelve feet because of the industrial sprinklers used in parks. The firehose jets of water will nearly tear a box off of a tree. Purvis had many nests drowned until a way was found to get the boxes up very high. His method is by using hanging boxes and lifting them into place with a long lifting device. During the convention, a bluebird trail in an urban park will be visited, the lifting device will be demonstrated, and various hanging boxes will be shown.

Exciting programs of interest not just for bluebirders but for anyone who loves the natural world have been arranged. For those interested in birds, on Friday, there's a field trip to Santiago Regional Park which features chaparral, riparian, oak forest, grassland communities, their edges, and their many niches for a wide variety of birds. For others, there's an alternate field trip to Newport Beach and pier featuring the Pacific ocean, oceanic and beach birds, and numerous shops which cater to tourists. Also on Friday, a picnic lunch

at Yorba Regional Park will be followed by guided tours of the Park Bluebird trail and nesting Wood Ducks.

The evening program at the host hotel (Newport Beach Sheraton) starts at 8:00PM when **Dick Purvis** will speak and present slides on Urban Bluebird Trails. Next, **Sylvia & Jim Gallagher** give their dramatic and professional slide show on the Bolsa Chica Salt Marsh. Featured are superb pictures of the birds of Bolsa Chica, a rare wetland in southern California.

The general NABS meeting will be held Saturday with speakers including **Alan Schoenherr** on California Wildlands, **Mini Nagendran** on Cranes of the World, **Andee Burrell** on Whales, and **Dick Zembal** on Marshes and Rails. Saturday night, the annual banquet keynote speaker will be **Mike Wallace**, Curator of Birds at the Los Angeles Zoo. He will speak and show slides on the California Condor and recent developments in reestablishing them in California and Arizona.

Sunday's field trip to the Bolsa Chica salt marsh promises the chance to see hundreds of nesting Least, Elegant, and Royal Terns, Black Skimmers, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Clapper Rails, Belding Savannah Sparrows, and other salt marsh birds.

Special rates apply before April 19. Obtain more details from **Ernest Schimmelman**, 6131 Foxfield Lane, Yorba Linda CA 92886-5824. Phone (714) 693-9025 or e-mail: schimmew@sce.com

**Don Yoder** has put out a call for volunteers to take shifts at CBRP's table during part of the program when attendees visit the displays from around the country.

This is a great opportunity for CBRP members and supporters to meet and promote our program to other Californians and to visitors from around the Nation. See you there.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

FROM PAGE 1

**Earliest and Latest Hatching Dates**

We asked our folks in Amador and El Dorado Counties for their earliest and latest estimated hatching dates from their 1996 records. Of course it will vary from north to south, year to year, and by elevation, but here's what was reported:

Western Bluebird: 2 April and 29 July; Ash-Throated Flycatcher: 23 May and 9 July; Tree Swallow: 24 April and 11 July; Violet-Green Swallow: 11 May and 11 July; House Wren: 1 April and 17 June; Plain Titmouse: 11 April and 29 May; Mountain Chickadee: 24 June and 17 July.

**Tough "Winter" in the High Country**

**Barbara Moore** has an 83-box trail in the Prosser Lake and Russell Valley area of Nevada County—much of it above 5000'. In mid-June she reports, "a cold spell caused widespread devastation in Tree Swallow and Mountain Bluebird nests—young were hatched and well on the way to fledging—Tree Swallows: 47 dead young; Mountain Bluebirds: 18 dead young."

As you can see on the report, Barbara's work was not all a failure. She fledged a total of 257 birds (third highest in the State), including 53 Tree Swallows, 125 Mountain Bluebirds, and 69 Mountain Chickadees.

**Vespids--A Big Problem Last Spring**

Paperwasps, yellow jackets, hornets, and other Vespids caused a lot of problems last Spring. **Bill & Doris Allison** fought them off by repeated visits trying to smash the adults, and by leaving the side propped open for a few days to discourage their return. If the adult female wasp is left alive, she will repeatedly return to continue nesting.

With paperwasps, destroying the nest is not enough. If the adult is not

killed, she will start rebuilding immediately. The Allison's idea of leaving the door open so the box is less inviting is well worth trying. After a few days, with luck, the wasp will have squatted in another place.

As many of you reported, if the wasps are there, the birds won't nest. **Jack Willburn's** 116 box trail was a disappointment last year because of the unusually large population of wasps.

**Masses of Earwigs**

Disgusting at best, but since they are vegetarians they seem to pose no great threat to nest occupants. However, the bluebirds seem to avoid boxes where cupfuls of earwigs are massed. Dump them out and bluebirds will eat them, but if the birds aren't there, we need to get rid of them. **Jim Fletcher's** solution may be of help to you.

In 1995, Jim was plagued with masses of earwigs in his nestboxes. Early last Spring he moved his boxes off the fence posts around the Forest Service Nursery and hung them from the woven wire fence itself. He reports a great reduction in the earwigs last year.

**Dean Carrier** used the same technique the Allison's used on wasps. He scraped the earwigs out then left the box open for a few days before closing up.

**Large Trails**

The largest trails reported in the State were:

**Dick Purvis**, Orange County—334 Bluebird boxes,

**Donald Dahlsten**, El Dorado County—125 Chickadee boxes

**Jack Willburn**, El Dorado County—116 Bluebird boxes

**James D. Cox**, Orange County—107 Bluebird boxes

**Donald E. Yoder**, Contra Costa Co.—105 Bluebird boxes

**James H. Guthrie**, Calaveras Co.—96 Bluebird boxes

**Barbara Moore**, Nevada County—

83 Bluebird boxes

**Tom Hoffman**, San Joaquin Co.—80 Bluebird boxes

**Warren Engstrom**, Contra Costa Co.—65 Bluebird boxes

**Janet Varcoe's** Team, Amador County—61 Bluebird boxes

**Hatch & Judy Graham**, El Dorado & Alpine Cos.—50 Bluebird boxes

**Bill & Doris Allison**, Amador County—46 Bluebird boxes

Another 12 trails have 20 or more boxes.

**Biological Control**

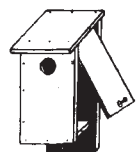
It's a pleasure to include **Tom Hoffman's** 11 barn owl boxes and **Don Dahlsten's** 125 Chickadee boxes in the Annual Report. Tom's barn owls provide gopher control in his vineyards. More about Dahlsten's project in a later issue.

**Hope for the Empty Boxes**

In 1995, we established 10 boxes in Amador County with **Penny Saulsbury** monitoring, and another 10 on the Gladwill Ranch in El Dorado County. It was very disappointing. Penny had no birds at all. At Gladwill's, only one box was used, though it produced a clutch of Plain Titmice, and a clutch of Violet-Green Swallows.

Last year, Penny had two clutches of bluebirds in one box, fledged 8. **Dave Delongchamp**, who took over as monitor of the Gladwill trail, had 3 clutches of Bluebirds, 2 clutches of Ash-Throated Flycatchers, 3 of Violet-Green Swallows, 1 Plain Titmouse, and 1 White-breasted Nuthatch, for a total of 34 fledglings.

The moral for the 43 of you who reported no birds: Things can only get better. And your efforts are appreciated by all of the rest of us. Don't despair. Your boxes will be there when the birds need them.



**NOTES FROM THE FIELD**

*from page 1*

the box first. Use a small spray of 1 T. of bleach in a pint of water. If the boxes are properly ventilated, drying will occur unattended after closure. For the wasps, rub some laundry soap or petroleum jelly on the underside of the lid. Follow up by monitoring regularly.)

San Luis Obispo County has gaps in the Bluebird population too. Coordinator **Allan Naydol** moved to new property of 2 acres and immediately put up 8 boxes. "I never even got a look!... we haven't seen one Bluebird on the entire Nipomo Mesa! There are known Bluebirds to the north, east and south of me but none right here. Will keep trying. Maybe next year we'll get some. I got neighbors to put up boxes too. No one got anything. Strange... especially since we are surrounded by annual grassland pastureland. (Comment: Wonder whether absence of watering spots could be a factor?)

In the upper reaches of the State **Charles Welch**, Modoc County Coordinator, needed 1 hand to count the successes as they occurred along his trail. He writes: "Believe it or not this has been the year for quintuplets: 10 Western (2 groups of 5); 10 Mountain (2 groups of 5); 5 Ash-throated Flycatchers (1 group of 5); Western blues 5 eggs laid, nest and eggs abandoned. The Mountain and Western blues used the same houses for each fledging of 10. Flycatcher used a third house. Of 7 houses only 3 were used all season. 4 were unoccupied. For us an exceptional year.

Even before the old year ended some birders were preparing for the new season. Placer County Coordinator **Lesa Chan** has trudged the snowy slopes to check out 40 boxes on National Forest land. And she has **Daren Ross**, Sierra Foothills A.S. lined up to do the monitoring. (Comment: Good foresight and planning.)

These are good notes and reports, largely from Coordinators. We welcome all such addenda to your annual reports from along all trails. If you have problems, experiences or tales to tell, attach a note and let others share them. We'll be glad to include them in an upcoming Newsletter.

**Notes on Networking**

We are particularly taken by a memorandum received recently from **Viola Sampert**, Trail Coordinator with **Hatch Graham** in El Dorado County.

**COMPARING NABS & PETERSON NESTBOXES**

*by Hatch Graham*

We paired Peterson boxes with NABS boxes in two locations in 1996. Ten pairs were placed on **Bill & Doris Allison's** ranch near Plymouth in Amador County at an elevation of about 900'. These were monitored by the Allisons. Another 19 Peterson boxes were hung alongside 19 existing NABS style boxes (Cornell Lab front opening) at the Forest Service Nursery near Camino, El Dorado County; elevation 3100'. The Cornell boxes had been erected for the 1995 season. These boxes are monitored by **Jim Fletcher**. All of the paired boxes were 8 to 15 feet apart.

On the Allison Ranch, one NABS box was used while 4 Peterson boxes were used. The NABS box failed to fledge any birds, whereas the Petersons with 2 double clutches fledged 27 bluebirds.

At the Forest Service Nursery, 6 NABS boxes were used as opposed to 4 Petersons hosting birds. There were 2 double clutches in each type with a total of 29 fledged from the NABS and 20 fledged from the Petersons.

The NABS boxes preexisted for a season at the Nursery so we don't know if the birds came back to the boxes they'd used the year before or if they really prefer them. We'll watch it for a few years.

The two have worked together beautifully, running a tight little ship with rapidly expanding numbers—bluebirders and trails. They have secured loads of lumber, and, along with **Jim Fletcher**, another of El Dorado's Trail Coordinators, built and distributed untold numbers of boxes, enlisted numerous monitors and maintained close contact with custodians of those boxes. When reporting time came around, followups were made to secure the records so important to measuring the annual results of our Program.

Since Hatch has a computer and manipulates it with great alacrity he will do the record keeping for El Dorado County and Amador County where Coordinator **Penny Saulsbury** also keeps tab on her enlistees. Hatch was aiming for 1,000 boxes in his data base, and with a last minute find of **Don Dahlsten's** 125 box trail, he ended 1996 with 1,105 nestboxes in the two counties. Not much more could be said about the energy and attention these four coordinators contribute to the welfare and propagation of our friendly Blues. Their success is reflected in the numbers of Annual Reports submitted, outdistancing all other Counties combined, both last year and this. Lovers of the Blues indeed owe them a debt of gratitude.

Space doesn't permit praise for all the nestbox builders, but utmost thanks to **Frank Lesan**, **Eric Lester**, **Frank Welch**, and **Eugene Loeder** for the many boxes you've provided for the cavity nesters. If you know of other volume builders, tell us so we can give them proper credit.

**COPY THIS FORM!**

Here's your CBRP Form 1 for your notes this season. Copy one form for each box you monitor. **TIP:** A copy on green paper is easier on your eyes than white when in the bright sun.



# INDIVIDUAL NESTBOX RECORD

## California Bluebird Recovery Program

Name				Year				Box design name (see nestbox sketches)							
Mailing Address   <i>[Note: the shaded information on this form is for your use. If you have extensive trails, you may find it useful to keep track of locations, etc.; or to report to others for special requests.]</i>				Nestbox faces: _____ Distance to nearest tree: _____ Distance from nearest nestbox: _____ Entry height above ground: _____								floor dimensions: _____"x_____" entry above floor: _____"			
				Physical location of box or trail if other than above (No PO Boxes, please).								County			
Box Support (circle one): Wooden Post Metal Post Tree Stump Building Hanging Box Other: _____ Predator guard: Extra Thick Entrance Five inch Roof Overhang Sheet Metal Gd. Hardware cloth porch Other: _____				Geographic information:  Latitude _____° _____' _____" N Longitude _____° _____' _____" W				Elevation: _____'  7½ minute USGS Quadrangle: _____							
Habitat (circle best description): Grassland Pasture Orchard Fence Row Cultivated Field Forest-Pasture Edge Suburban Building Site Wetland Oak-Savannah Brush-Pasture Edge Other: _____															
Date of visit	Check made by	Is nest present?	No. of eggs	Est. Date of hatch	No. of young	No. fledged	Bird Species	Comments: (recent weather, condition of young, parasites, predation, banding, box repair needed, encroachment of woody vegetation, observations, etc.)							
Note: This form provides additional space for recording nest data and comments on the reverse side. There is also space for your annual totals for this nestbox.															
Please consolidate your data on CBRP Form 2 (Annual Report) and return it at season's end to your County Coordinator or to: CBRP, % Don Yoder, 2021 Ptarmigan Drive #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595-3506.								Standard size _____ Larger size _____ Smaller size _____		Box Number:					

## INDIVIDUAL NESTBOX RECORD (continued)

### California Bluebird Recovery Program

Date of visit	Check made present?	Is nest of	Est. ber of eggs	Num-Date of hatch	Num-ber fledged young	Bird ber	Species	Comments: (recent weather, condition of young, parasites, predation, banding, box repair needed, encroachment of woody vegetation, observations, etc.)
<b>Annual Totals:</b>								<p>← Transfer this data (added to the same from other nestboxes) to the ANNUAL REPORT (CBRP Form 2)</p>
Number of Attempts (Nests with eggs)							species 1	
<b>Annual Totals:</b>								
Number of Attempts (Nests with eggs)							species 2	

Additional Comments:

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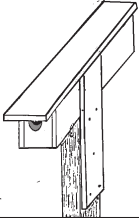
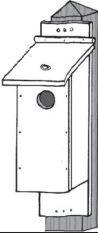
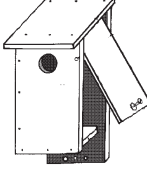
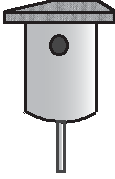
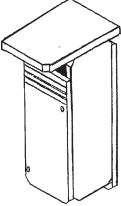
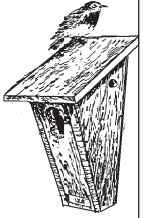
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Record this nestbox's design on the front of the form The number below and on the other side is the one you have assigned to this individual box.	tree branch box	NABS top opening	NABS side opening	PVC pipe	Slot box	Peterson V box
<b>Box Number:</b>						

**THESE COORDINATORS ARE READY TO HELP YOU****Alameda County**

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(see Napa & Sonoma)

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## California Bluebird Recovery Program

Founded in 1994, and affiliated with the California Field Office of the National Audubon Society and the North American Bluebird Society, CBRP is "for the encouragement and preservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West."

CBRP is non-profit, has no paid staff, and is supported entirely by the efforts of volunteers and donations accepted by the Mt.Diablo Audubon Society on CBRP's behalf.

CBRP members had located and reported on 2,400 nestboxes by the end of 1996, with more than 5,000 cavity nesters fledged—over 3,000 of them western and mountain bluebirds.

CBRP welcomes membership from the public who wish to support its program, and especially seeks those who will place appropriate nestboxes in the proper habitat, faithfully monitor the birds' progress through the nesting season, and report yearly on the results.

Send \$5 or more made payable to "MDAS—Bluebirds" to Don Yoder at the address shown on the far right.

## Monitoring Guide Available

A 32-page booklet, *Monitoring Your Bluebird Trail in California*, has just been released. Its predecessor, designed for Amador & El Dorado Counties has been expanded by its author, Hatch Graham, after a year of field testing. It includes descriptions and pictures of all of the cavity nesters in this State that might use your bluebird nestboxes. Procedures for when and how to monitor, preventing nest failures, estimating the hatching date, visual aging of nestlings, are explained in detail.

Copies are available for a \$2.00 donation and an SASE (self-addressed 6"x 9" envelope with 55¢ postage affixed).

Bulk rates are available. Proceeds above actual costs go to CBRP and are, therefore, tax-deductible, if you qualify. See box to the right for address.

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## California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

Has your subscription expired?

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