



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program's newsletter

—sponsored by the National Audubon Society-California
—an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

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

Annual reports are now due This newsletter is being sent to non-subscribers

We thank you subscribers who received the last newsletter and have already sent in your Annual Report (Form 2) which was included in the last issue of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!*

If you didn't get it, we appeal to you to pay the minimal subscription rate of \$5 and so make it possible to keep this newsletter coming to you.

How does the California Bluebird Recovery Program work? It is operated entirely by volunteers. While national organizations like the National Audubon Society-California and the North American Bluebird Society give us moral support, we receive little monetary help from them. (NAS-CA does let us use their bulkmail permit which is greatly appreciated.)

Don Yoder, our Program Director, is retired and a volunteer. He's signed onto email and obtained a fax machine to correspond to the editors of the newsletter and anyone else on electronic mail—at his own expense. The editors, **Hatch & Judy Graham**, are volunteers. **Viola Sampert** in the Georgetown Divide is a volunteer, so is **Jim Fletcher** and **Dick Purvis**. All of our County Coordinators are **unpaid** volunteers.

We emphasize unpaid, because it's obvious that people like Elizabeth Dole, head of the American Red Cross, is not unpaid though most Red Cross volunteers are. **We have no paid officers.**

Chances are, if you don't pay

your dues, we volunteers won't quit. But you may not get a newsletter, phone calls, or support. Many of you received free nestboxes, forms, monitoring booklets, and advice for the asking. Isn't it time you returned the pittance we're asking for the newsletter?

We're considering a dues schedule like many organizations, to include, at the basic \$5 level, *BLUEBIRDS FLY!* For a \$10 donation, in addition to *BLUEBIRDS FLY!*, a copy of Hatch Graham's *Monitoring your Bluebird Trail in California*. At higher levels, yet to be determined, copies of nestbox plans and other goodies. But that's in the future.

Right now you have two jobs to do (if you haven't done it). **Send in your Annual Report and send us some money!**—either to your coordinator or to the Program Director.

Frankly, the Annual Report is more important. We need the data, even if nothing happened. But why not save a stamp and send your check with your report. We promise you we won't bug you by phone for your check, but we will call about your report if it's not forthcoming in the next couple of weeks.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. Your comments on your annual report will be considered for **NOTES FROM THE FIELD** in the Winter edition.

SEND REPORT! SEND MONEY!

Cornell nestbox network seeking dedicated monitors

In the last issue of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!*, we reported on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's project called CNBN (Cornell Nest Box Network).

During 1997 they enrolled more than 500 citizen scientists as individuals or groups to report on more specific details of the monitoring that we ask of CBRP members and co-operators. We inadvertently signed up as a "group" when CNBN intended that category for youth groups such as 4-H, scouts, etc. The papers we signed failed to include the distinction, but we understand Cornell's position in wishing more direct contact with their cooperators.

Still the studies are worthwhile. For a \$15 enrollment, you receive a nice 3-ring binder with species descriptions, nestbox plans, study protocols, and forms.

The Clutch Size Study which several of us participated in this year requests detailed information about the size, shape, height, aspect, and location of each of your nestboxes; and how close they are from each other. Then you are asked to describe each attempted nesting with such details as date of the first egg, date of the last egg (which can be calculated), number hatched, and number fledged. For bluebirds, the color of the eggs—blue or white.

We urge your consideration to help learn more about our birds. Contact CNBN, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Rd. Ithaca, NY 14850-1999.

ORANGE COUNTY BLUEBIRDERS MEET TO SHARE SUCCESS

Fifteen bluebirders met on August 2 in Irvine Regional Park for a family picnic and get-together. The park was an appropriate place because of the great success **James Cox** has had with bluebirds there. All day a small flock of bluebirds could be seen nearby. This year Cox had 65 nests and 237 fledglings in the county—many in Irvine Park.

The festivities started with a lunch of hamburgers, hotdogs, potato salad, chili beans, and watermelon.

The attendees represent a large increase of bluebirders for this urban county. **Dick Purvis** has been instrumental in recruiting them, giving them instructions, assisting in establishing trails, providing equipment, and even allotting some parts of his own trails which were becoming too large to manage alone.

Among the activities was a discussion of nests of the major cavity-nesters in the area, some of which the newer members had never seen. Nestboxes made from fencing, tongue and groove siding, 1 1/8" pine, and standard 3/4" pine were available for inspection. The merits of various box designs were discussed. The hanging box lift equipment was demonstrated.

A principal purpose of the meeting was to sum up the total nesting results for Orange County. As anticipated, the increase in nests and fledglings was substantial. For Western Bluebirds alone, in 487 boxes there were 486 nests, 2296 eggs, 1962 chicks, and 1783 fledglings. In adjacent Los Angeles County there were 3 boxes, 16 eggs, 14 chicks, and 14 fledglings; and in nearby Riverside County, 39 nests, 184 eggs, 154 chicks, and 147 fledglings. One of the obvious facts this

NABS move to Wisconsin announced

The headquarters of the North American Bluebird Society is moving from its longtime home in Silver Spring, MD to Darlington, WI in late October.

With the impending retirement of Executive Director **Mary Janetatos**, **Carol McDaniel**, who is currently serving as Vice President, will assume the executive functions. Other retirements announced include **Joanne Solem**, Editor of *Sialia*, NABS's quarterly magazine. No replacement for the editor has yet been named.

TITMOUSE HAS SPLIT PERSONALITY

The American Ornithologists' Union has done it again—the Plain Titmouse has reportedly been divided into two species, hereafter to be known as the Oak Titmouse and the Juniper Titmouse. It better reflects their habitats and habits. (Can't imagine either one of them liked being called 'Plain' anyway. —Ed.)

data shows is there are not enough boxes since an extremely high percentage were used.

Other species with significant showings were Ash-throated Flycatchers with 20 nests and Tree Swallows with 17 nests. The swallow numbers were really surprising. Five years ago was the first nesting of this species. They are increasing every year in number and range. Purvis comments that we are going to have to learn to cope with them now as other bluebirders have in the rest of the U.S.

The meeting and picnic was judged a great success. Many learned how to better manage a bluebird trail. Next year another large increase is expected with the many more dedicated people helping the bluebirds.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

Founded in 1994, sponsored by National Audubon Society-California and affiliated with 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 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 below.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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American Kestrel ecology & behavior

by Ron Rohrbaugh

Question: What is the best location for a kestrel nestbox in relationship to my bluebird trail?

I'm no expert on bluebirds, but I've conducted quite a bit of research on kestrel nesting ecology and behavior.

First off, let's talk about the diet of kestrels. During the winter months kestrels mainly prey on small mammals and birds. For the most part, males specialize on birds in dense habitats such as old fields, whereas females hunt mammals in more open habitats such as pastures, hayfields and median strips. Males are smaller, faster, and more maneuverable than females, thus giving them the edge on birds. In the summer months, however, both males and females shift their diet to insects. This is not to say that they don't also eat a few birds and mammals during the breeding season.

Of the bird remains I've found in kestrels' nests, most have been from house sparrows. I never remember finding bluebird remains, although I'm sure they eat a few. My point

is, kestrels rarely eat bluebirds and may benefit bluebirds by reducing the number of House Sparrows competing for nestboxes in a given area.

In the eastern U.S., the radius of kestrel nesting territories is approximately 0.3 mi (528 yards). However, I've found they only aggressively defend the area within 100 yds of a nest. To reduce the frequency of stressful and energy-sapping interactions for both kestrels and bluebirds, I suggest keeping bluebird boxes at least 150 yds from kestrel boxes.

In general, try to locate kestrel boxes in large open areas, such as pastures or hay fields. Single large trees standing in the middle of a field are excellent choices. In addition, ideal locations for kestrel boxes are at least 100 yards from forests, row crop fields (e.g., corn, soybeans), and houses. Orient the entrance hole of the box eastward and hang it 10-20 ft above the ground. Clearing foliage from around the box so that it is clearly visible will also help attract kestrels. Hope this helps.

Ron Rohrbaugh is Assistant Director of Education at Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.

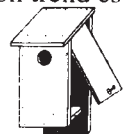
Western Bluebird decline continues in California

The following summary is taken from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS).

During the breeding season, Western Bluebirds normally occupy open woodlands in the foothills and lower mountains. In California, they are regularly found in both oak and coniferous woods. Unlike other bluebirds, this species usually avoids large open fields.

The breeding distribution of Western Bluebirds has not markedly changed during this century.

Based on data from BBS routes, Western Bluebirds are most numerous in California and portions of Arizona and New Mexico. The long-term (1966-1994) trends show declines in California and Arizona. Small sample sizes preclude detailed analyses of the trends during 1966-1979. The 1980-1994 trends are similar to the long-term results, but include a decline in the survey-wide population. The trend map indicates that declines are centered in California and Arizona, but also occur throughout most of its range. Increasing populations are most prevalent in portions of Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. The survey-wide indices show periodic increases followed by declines, generally in 4-5 year cycles. Whether or not these cyclical fluctuations are real or an artifact of the BBS coverage in the western states is unknown. However, the overall trends are fairly stable. The California population has declined throughout the survey period. Data from this state comprises nearly one-half of all BBS data for Western Bluebirds, and has a large influence on the regional population trend estimates.



BUILDING A NESTBOX FOR AN AMERICAN KESTREL

The American Kestrel (sparrow hawk) uses a box similar to a bluebird's only bigger. If you want to set one up 50 yards from that barn with all the sparrows in it, the blues will thank you for it. The kestrel nestbox should have at least an 8"x 8" floor and the box should be 15-23" deep. The center of the 3" entry hole should be located 12" above the floor and 3" below the top edge of the front. As mentioned in Ron Rohrbaugh's article above, place it in a tree or on a pole 10 to 30 ft above the ground in an open field.

BAN boards bandwagon

Bluebird Across Nebraska (BAN) report in their Summer newsletter that they, like CBRP, have affiliated with NABS, the North American Bluebird Society. They join with California, the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Committee and the Ohio Bluebird Society in affiliation.

It's the holes...

In New York, Kevin Berner conducted studies to determine reasons for nestbox preferences. Peterson boxes and standard boxes with round holes and oval holes were tested. Eastern Bluebirds preferred standard boxes with oval holes. Tree swallows preferred Peterson boxes with round holes. More later.

House Wrens — Give 'em Room!

Barbara Boyle of the Johnson County Songbird Project in Oxford, IA has a 5 page article on the World Wide Web called *The Great Wren Debate Revisited*. In it, she recounts the studies of **Althea R. Sherman**, a self-educated naturalist of the early part of this century, and her lifelong studies of the House Wren. It was Miss Sherman's ultimate conclusion that the worst sin she had ever committed was "the putting up of bird houses and allowing them to be occupied by House Wrens."

The article is worth reading and can be obtained on the internet at website: <http://users.aol.com/jimmcl/bbbox/wren.htm>

Several CBRP members have asked about losses of eggs or eggs found broken in front of their nest-boxes. Wrens are probably to blame more often than previously believed.

While CBRP supports all cavity nesters, we might take steps so as not to favor birds as abundant as wrens when we're trying to bolster populations in decline like the Western Bluebird.

An article in the Jan-Mar '97 issue of *North American Bird Bander* entitled "An Effective Trap for the House Wren" sheds some light on wren behavior and gives some guidelines that may help us avoid predation by the wrens. **S. Pribil** of the Dept. of Biology, U. of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada has studied breeding biology of House Wrens for a number of years. Pribil says:

"House Wrens are notorious for destroying eggs of other birds (Kendeigh 1941, Bent 1948). Both males and females engage in this behavior and destroy eggs of other House Wrens, other cavity-nesting species, and even eggs of species building open-top nests (Belles-Isles & Picman 1986). When a wren finds a nest that is momentarily un-

guarded, it enters the nest and pecks holes in the eggs. If small young are present, they may be pecked as well (Bent 1948). Broken eggs are either left in the nest or carried out and dropped on the ground. The whole attack, from arrival on the nest to departure, may last only 14 to 50 seconds (Pribil & Picman 1992). The function of the behavior is little known: because House Wrens cannot excavate their own cavities, it is believed that they break eggs of other hole-nesting birds in order to drive them away and thereby acquire a vacant cavity for their own use (Pribil & Picman 1991, Spooner, et al. 1996)."

Using the wrens' egg-pecking behavior, Pribil designed a trap consisting of a nestbox with an egg on a lever which, when pecked, closes the entry hole. The trapping is done in connection with bird banding operations. Pribil's further observations give insight into the proper location for attracting House Wrens.

"...[T]he effectiveness of the trap is influenced by two factors: (1) location of the trap within a territory; and (2) time of the breeding season. The best location for the box appears to be in open space, several meters away from shrubs and trees. The trapping box should be clearly visible from the House Wren nest. The distance between the trapping box and the nest is important. If the trapping box is placed too close (i.e. 1 to 5 m [3 to 16 ft.] from the nest), the wrens may avoid it. The avoidance is presumably due to the fact that wrens are inhibited from pecking eggs near their nest to prevent the destruction of their own eggs (Pribil & Picman 1992). If the trapping box is placed too far (i.e. more than 40 m [130 ft] from the nest or outside the territory), the wrens may

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Burton bluebird trail has many possibilities

by Mike Hauptman

In 1989 Jackson Street School science teacher **Mike Taylor** had his students build bluebird boxes. Soon after their completion the boxes were placed along Hwy 3 just west of Yreka, Siskiyou Co. Following the northern fence line of the Burton Forest Ranch, the trail dips a bit south up the ranch driveway and on to the Girl Scout camp location a half mile or so west of the forest house.

After chatting with Mr. Burton, I obtained permission to check out the trail, and found that the boxes were holding the nesting debris of several years, some being completely full of twigs and grass, and also that some were in need of repair. Excited at this point by the potential this trail held for our Western and Mountain Bluebirds (in addition to seeing several birds entering the boxes), I approached the Marble Mountain Audubon Society (MMAS) board of directors with my findings. They also were excited with the possibilities, and so together we formed a committee to take on this task.

Over the next couple of weeks we were able to round up several people from MMAS and from NABS. We, **Barbara & Don Judd, Dudley Zoller**, and **Sandy & Ken Maurer** from MMAS, and **Elizabeth Crispin** and **Nancy Graves** from NABS [and CBRP-ed.] met at the Burton Ranch in February at 10 o'clock. The weather forecasts the evening before forced me to accept we'd be working in the rain, and so it was a welcome sight to see clear skies upon awakening.

And so we began our day by splitting up into pairs and working the 1½ mile trail; two groups worked

continued next page—

Burton trail ...*—continued from page 4*

from the middle out, while the other two worked from the sides in. A couple of hours later we all met again, somewhere near the middle of the trail, and decided on lunch at Nature's Kitchen to compile our data from the boxes.

We found that there were 31 boxes on the newly-named Burton Trail and that all of them had been occupied at one time or another. We also found that some of the boxes needed repair, that all of them needed drain holes drilled in them, and that some should be remounted for stability or to facilitate their monitoring.

The Burton Trail is a wonderful opportunity for members of Siskiyou County to take an active part in the restoration of our ecosystem. The Western and Mountain Bluebirds have been subjected to a huge loss of their natural nesting sites, such as abandoned woodpecker nests once commonly found in snags, as well as a loss of their preferred habitat—semi-open, low-grass land bordered by forest.

As a result, bluebird numbers have declined [markedly. See article on page 3.] MMAS and NABS [CBRP] need volunteers to help with monitoring of the trail, with collecting data, maintenance, and in getting the word out that such help is needed. These tasks can be accomplished by giving a very small amount of your time, by donating lumber, by putting up a bluebird house or starting a trail, or by talking to a neighbor about the Burton Trail and its purpose.

We met several times at the Burton Ranch to do some of the maintenance I mentioned above; we drilled drain holes in the box bottoms, relocated a few boxes, and did the maintenance necessary for their

*continued on page 12—***NOTES FROM THE FIELD***by Don Yoder*

P.C. "Red" Pendleton, reporting from San Mateo/Santa Clara, notes that Eagle Scout candidates are very effective in establishing new trails and in securing reliable monitoring. They have the incentives of meeting Eagle requirements for leadership and project completion. But, unfortunately, they usually move on to new schools and the trails fall into neglect. A succession of monitors and oversight needs to be arranged for the next year.



Last year's runaway leader in bluebird production, **Dick Purvis**, appears well on his way to top position again this year (see Orange County... on page 2). Dick's outstanding record is established in largely urbanized areas and demonstrates how utilization of created habitat can pay off in successful cavity nester production. Dick reports on 3 counties—and that means a lot of traveling and dedication.



Calaveras County monitor **Mary Mollett** of Murphys, CA reports only 1 of her 3 boxes was used this year, fewer than in '96. She observed confrontations between Western Bluebirds and Ash-throated Flycatchers around a box and only determined "who won" by observing the successful speckled eggs.

Well, we're trying to help all cavity-nesters and the winners may not be our first choice. We wonder whether such competition doesn't indicate a shortage of housing? A second paired box 10-20 ft from the initial box could perhaps solve a problem for a new tenant.



Trail monitors needed in Marysville. The Dept. of Fish & Game has a clutch of 100 nestboxes

available and land available for placement in Yuba and Sutter Counties. If you'd like to establish a trail, with nestbox building work completed, call **Dale Whitmore** at (916) 743-5068 to dip into this windfall.



Jim Guthrie, Calaveras County, reports severe losses of bluebirds due to feral cats and raccoon raids among 10 of his boxes on his trail at New Hogan Reservoir. Cats continued to harass birds after Noel guards were installed. Jim also constructed 60 new slot boxes which produced well but were slightly damaged by coons.



Alameda County Coordinator, **Ann Kositsky**, has boxes in Tilden Park, Berkeley. She reports seeing very few Violet-green Swallows this year, whereas they were much in evidence in past years. She reports no nesting attempts in '97.



As mentioned in the report on the Orange County get-together, **James D. Cox** provided a noteworthy report of 237 bluebirds from 65 boxes. Golf course sprinklers were his main concern.



Also from Orange County, **Bob Franz** of Placentia reports that he has two boxes—one occupied, the other ignored on the grounds of a country club. Bob monitors with a Hanging Box Lifter and is apparently quite recognizable to the pair nesting 100 yds from his first stop. He regularly parks near the unoccupied box and is greeted by the agitated pair of blues who then follow him to their occupied box, continuing their normal commotion at his 'intrusion'. Bob wonders if it's his hat or his

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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lifter that gets their attention. (Maybe they're just overjoyed at his visits.)



The following appeared in the *Rossmoor News* on July 16, 1997:

A pleasing number of people have expressed interest in the bluebird nestbox trails on the golf course and elsewhere in Rossmoor. Such interest is appreciated. Trails are individually operated and monitored on a regular basis. The information collected from each box constitutes the annual report to the California Bluebird Recovery Program summary and North American Bluebird Society's continental totals.

In the past, some creatures, human or otherwise, have disturbed some of the boxes by inserting foreign objects or blocking the entrances. One box containing an active nest was stolen. This year, the "creatures" have removed entire nests, some containing eggs and one possibly with young just before fledging. Three boxes were thoroughly cleaned; no nesting material was strewn about the area, indicating that the material may have been collected for study specimens.

Besides skewing the records for 1997's nesting season, the disappearance of one nest and eggs means four or five birds will never reach maturity, will never enjoy sunlight to eat a gob of insects and will never grace our lawns with their beauty and delightful songs.

Using the phone number on each box will get the caller an earful of information about the program—maybe, to anyone with such a well developed box cleaning ability—a

proposal to enlist as a monitor. It might also locate study material from an unsuccessful nest, without appropriating viable nests nearing maturity. And besides, interfering, etc., with native migratory birds is a federal offense.

*Donald E Yoder
Program Director, CBRP
Ptarmigan Drive*



You may remember in our last issue, we mentioned the finding of a 10-day old chick in a nest with 13-day old siblings. These chicks were banded in Lynn Smart's only box. The box is mounted on a power pole at the corner of her yard. To protect it from predators, her husband fastened a piece of stove pipe around the pole. In spite of good intentions, a raccoon succeeded in climbing up over the slick pipe, tore the wings off three chicks, devoured them, and was working on the fourth when Lynn's German Shepherd Dog woke up and attacked the coon. By the time they had gotten outside, they found feathers and wings of the coon's meal, the fourth alive with an amputated wing, and the little sister still in the nest

unharmred. The injured chick couldn't be saved.

However, the pair nested again. This time the Smarts had an electric fence around the base of the nest and they fledged a second clutch without interference. A second female with a silver bracelet on her right leg was observed helping mom and pop feed the nestlings.



San Mateo County Coordinator **Howard Rathlesberger** sent us a drawing of one of his nestboxes with a yellow sunburst design around the opening. On closer inspection the yellow streaks radiating out from the opening proved to be pollen from the nest's new inhabitant—a bumblebee!



See page 11 for your County Coordinator. If you wish to send your Annual Report to your County Coordinator it will, perhaps, save them a call to check on you. In El Dorado and Amador Counties you will save us time by reporting directly to Hatch, Penny, Viola or Jim.

If your county is not listed, consider volunteering for the job. We'll pay you double the wages of the ones serving now!



Your Program Director and a number of County Coordinators have been presenting bluebird programs. Many people do not understand the seriousness of habitat loss and its effect on native wildlife so our programs have great educational value to many.

Programs including slide shows, nestbox displays, and box construction are available. Call us to schedule.



The Bluebird Lady

with her snips and shears
and glistening galoshes
tramps the muck of March
this morning on the lower
pasture. She's bearing wooden
space for feather nesting,
six-sided geometry to hold
a bird-warm dark.

And when she's set out
seven boxes, she comes
back flapping sleeves
against the gusts, the sky
as blue as bird wings.

Taylor Graham

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State/Zip: _____

Physical Location of Nestbox or Trail: _____ County: _____

Latitude & Longitude (if known): _____ Elevation: _____

Do you monitor more than one trail: _____ If yes, how many? _____ Total Number of Boxes on this Trail: _____
 Please send a separate report for each trail.

How many of your boxes are paired (less than 25 feet apart)? _____

SPECIES	No. of nesting Attempts*	No. of young Fledged**
Western Bluebird		
Mountain Bluebird		
Tree Swallow		
Violet-Green Swallow		
House Wren		
Bewick's Wren		
Black-Capped Chickadee		
Chestnut-Backed Chickadee		
Mountain Chickadee		
Plair. Titmouse		
White-Breaste		
Red-Brea		
Pygmy Nuthat		
Ash-Throated Flyca...her		
House Finch		
Kestrel		
Common Barn Owl		
Wood Duck		
Other (List):		

THIS FORM IS NOW OBSOLETE (4/06)

* An Attempt is a bird building a nest and laying at least one egg.

** A young bird has fledged if it leaves the nestbox on its own.

Use the other side of this sheet to describe interesting or unusual observations, predator problems, or other comments.

PLEASE MAIL COMPLETED REPORT BY SEPTEMBER 15, IF POSSIBLE, TO YOUR COUNTY COORDINATOR OR TO CBRP c/o DON YODER, 2021 PTARMIGAN DRIVE #1, WALNUT CREEK, CA 94595 OR FAX TO (510) 937-5974

—a summary of your report will be forwarded to the North American Bluebird Society—

Use this sheet to describe interesting or unusual observations, predator problems, or other comments.

OBSOLETE FORM

House Wrens!

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not find it or they may not be motivated to visit it. The optimum distance between the trap and the House Wren nest seems to be 15 to 25 m [50 to 80 ft].

“Because the trapping box makes use of the egg-pecking behavior, its effectiveness depends on the intensity of the behavior. The intensity of the behavior changes during the breeding season. It is the highest in early spring, before pair formation. At this time, all males and all females peck eggs in experimental nests (Belles-Isles & Picman 1986). After pair formation, the intensity of the behavior declines. During the incubation and nestling periods, 8% of the females and 26-35% of males continue to peck eggs in experimental nests (Pribil & Picman 1992). The changes in the intensity of the behavior presumably reflect the changing benefits that wrens derive from pecking eggs. Early in the season, wrens need to acquire nesting cavities for breeding and, consequently, all wrens engage in the behavior. Once a cavity is acquired, females cease to peck eggs. Males are, however, polygynous (i.e. one male breeds with several females) and need to acquire new cavities for additional females. This seasonal pattern of egg-pecking intensity indicates the trap would be most effective in capturing wrens early in the breeding season.”

What are the implications? First, nestboxes should be farther from House Wren habitat than earlier suspected—over 130 feet. Placing the bluebird box closer in a clear open space will invite a wren attack. The presence of the wrens is often unsuspected because their attacks are so quick and unexpected. If you are losing eggs, and can discount snakes, it's probably a wren.

SUPPORT CALIFORNIA BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROGRAM'S SPONSORS



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 nestbox design, control of competitors and predators, and enhanced techniques for increasing winter food supply. Membership is \$15. NABS's new mailing address is PO Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530. (after 10/23).



The National Audubon Society (NAS) has local chapters in all fifty states, Guam, and Latin America. In California there are over fifty local chapters. Chapters have newsletters, monthly programs, and field trips to local areas of interest.

To join NAS, contact your local Audubon Chapter, or call NAS-California at (916) 481-5332. National dues are \$20 for new members, and include a bi-monthly magazine as well as membership privileges in your local Audubon chapter.

Chickadees roost in the snow

Colleen Cassidy St. Clair of the Dept. of Biological Sciences, University of Alberta, is involved in a research project which examines how chickadees survive cold winter nights.

Using tiny radiotags, she is tracking chickadees to their nocturnal roost sites. To date, she has found them in birch and poplar tree cavities, in thick boughs of spruce trees and in snow holes [tree wells?—ed.] on the ground.

Snow holes occur in areas of greater tree density and lower wind speeds, both of which may result in less disturbance to the snow. On a very cold night, snow holes provide significantly warmer temperatures than do cavities.

Cavities, however, collect more heat from the sun during the day, and that heat may be radiated back to the chickadee on a moderately cold night. Chickadees may adjust their nocturnal roost site choices to the prevailing weather conditions, using the site that conserves the most heat on a given night.

Ms. St. Clair would like to know if anyone else has made observations of them roosting in snow. If so, please contact her at Dept. of Biological Sciences, U of Alberta, Edmonton, AB T6G 2E9, Canada. Phone (403) 492-7255 or fax (403) 492-9234.

While most Californians don't work in snow country, we have some trails at elevation, where we've wondered how the chickadees survive. The higher reaches of the San Gabriel, San Bernardino, Sierra Nevada and Cascade ranges might yield some information for Colleen's study. Lake Tahoe bluebirds take note. —ed.

Reprinted from Ellis Bird Farm newsletter from Wild Bird News (Edmonton) v.XI, no. 1

Disaster in Amador County: nestboxes become lunchboxes

by Hatch Graham

Rains poured in late Dec. and early Jan. then flowed out over saturated soils. The Mokelumne and Cosumnes Rivers were in flood stage. Gophers, mice and rabbits couldn't find high ground and were lost. Frogs and other amphibians were washed away. By March, the raccoon population was near starving.

Then the bluebirds arrived. Since 1980, when **Don Jenkins** placed 50 nestboxes on the Hwy 124 right-of-way fence, the Western blues have prospered. When the swallows began to use the boxes, Don paired many of them to accommodate both species. Later in the season, the Ash-throated Flycatchers often take over one of the box pairs.

Since we began monitoring the trail in 1994, there's always been some raccoon predation. After two years of losing birds in one section of the trail, we installed hanging boxes à la **Dick Purvis** in Orange County. Seven boxes 4 ft high on the fence were replaced by seven hanging in the blue oaks from 10 to 20 ft high early this year. It was a good thing. Otherwise our total output for the year would have been negative.

As it was, here is the sad record of our Hwy 124 trail:

We fledged 21 bluebirds from 66 boxes but lost 17 adults to raccoons. Only 4 swallows were fledged while 11 adults succumbed. Seven flycatchers fledged while 5 adults were taken. In addition to 34 adults massacred, we had 9 chicks who'd grown to the size where their wings were spit out on the ground.

Raccoons grab the birds from the nest and bite off the wings leaving them on the ground in front of the box. Wings and feathers at the box are almost a sure sign of a raccoon.

A feral cat will kill or wound the bird by biting it in the back of the neck but then will carry the bird away.

As I said, it's good we had the hanging boxes. Of the 21 blues fledged, 10 were from the hangers; all 4 swallows were from the trees; and 4 of the 7 flycatchers were also. In addition, we had two clutches of House Wrens amounting to 15 fledged from the hanging boxes.

I've been doing some real soul-searching to determine what to do. **Don Yoder** swears by the Noel Coon Guard. I know the hanging boxes work and on other trails I've erected elevator poles for people with house cats with relatively good success. The elevator pole or post was written up a couple of years ago by **Paul Chance** in *Sialia*. It consists of a 4.5 to 5 ft length of 2" PVC pipe into which is inserted a 5 ft length of 1½" PVC. The box is mounted to the top of the 1½" pipe. When telescoped down, the side-opening box is easily monitored. Then the inner pipe is elevated up about 4½ ft and the pipe secured in its elevated position with a nail slid through holes drilled through the set of pipes. Now the box is approximately 9 ft high.

I've recently been advised that electrical metallic tubing (EMT) or thinwall pipe is an excellent mount for raccoons. It is usually placed about 7½ ft high. This requires a ladder or stool to monitor. This would be okay in a level area but not in the rough terrain along Hwy 124.

Then I tried adapting Chance's Elevator Post to the EMT. A ½" section slips easily into a ¾" section. It's a little harder drilling holes but I'm building 46 boxes on eleva-

continued on page 12—

The saga of '194

In the midst of the carnage occurring on Hwy 124 (See article on the left), one remarkable example of survival and persistence stood out.

Hatch & Judy Graham were monitoring the trail. On 4/14, Judy recorded one blue egg in box 329. On the 4/21 there were five eggs. The estimated hatching date was calculated to be 5/2. So on 4/28, Hatch approached quietly and, holding his hand over the entry, cautiously opened the box. He peeked in to be met by the glare of Mrs. Bluebird sitting on her clutch. Carefully lifting her off the nest, he noted the 5 eggs were still in place, then banded the mother with band #1571-78194.

On 5/4, **Penny Saulsbury & Cassandra Draxler** were substituting for Hatch & Judy and found 2 eggs and 3 chicks. On 5/12, Judy found only one chick present with no sign of the others. On 5/20 the last chick was gone, presumably an early fledge but disappointing for Mrs. '194.

On 5/25, Hatch opened box 335 and found the mother glaring at him. He picked her up and could hardly believe it was Mrs. '194. She had a clutch of 2 eggs. Box 335 is 277 yds south of box 329. Alas, on 6/2, only one egg remained, pushed to the side with a hole pecked in it, obviously the result of House Wren predation.

On 6/10, 2 blue eggs were found in box 328, 141 yds north of 329. On 6/16 there were 5. On 6/22, Hatch opened the box to find—you guessed it—Mrs. '194 glaring once more. On 6/30 she had 5 healthy chicks in the nest. On 7/7, one chick had disappeared. On 7/14, young could be heard in the box, but they were too old to check. Finally on 7/20, all evidence was present of a successful fledging of the 4 chicks.

Without banding, who would have guessed Mrs. '194 would use 3 boxes over a range of 418 yds in one year?

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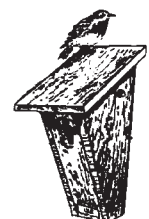
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Other reports from the North and East

BLUEBIRDS FLY! has entered into an informal exchange program with other bluebird organizations across the continent. Information from their newsletters offer us an insight into cavity nesting activities that may help us in California.

Donald J. Stiles of Calgary Area Bluebird Trail Monitoring Group sent us their 1996 Newsletter and Banding Report. Of interest is that they have 54 trails reporting, consisting of 2721 nestboxes. More importantly, their 15 bird banders banded 1577 Mountain Bluebirds and 2093 Tree Swallows last year. Four valuable long distance recoveries were reported; banded in 1994 and '95, these four birds traveled 65, 78, 127, and 127 miles from their original banding points. Only with concentrated banding such as this will we be able to learn as much as we'd like about

Burton trail ...

—continued from page 5

use [in the '97 season]. We plan to do more, and to regularly monitor the Burton Trail.... We would like to have any and all interested people to join us.... For more information call **Mike Hauptman** at (916)842-4332, or **Ken Maurer** at (916) 468-2978.

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our birds. Enlist a bander in your area to band your birds.

Harold Cox, editor of *Bluebirds Forever*, the quarterly newsletter for Project Bluebird in Joplin, MO is asking his people about a Statewide organization for Missouri.

Elsewhere, he comments that many have asked how to tell a House Sparrow nest from a bluebird nest and the answer is often given that the sparrow incorporates feathers in the nest. This has caused some confusion be-

...lunchboxes

—continued from page 10

tor posts and upping my hangers to 20. CalTrans is issuing us an encroachment permit for the right-of-way so our investment will be protected.

By the way, the cost of the EMT or thinwall pipe is nominal. It comes in 10 ft lengths. Pipe enough for two boxes costs about \$5.50. I find them easier to construct than to retrofit with Noel guards, and there remains the concern that the boxes with the guards on may be less acceptable. We'll see.

cause, in fact, the bluebirds also include a few feathers in their nests occasionally.

The House Sparrow nest usually fills up the whole box and may actually close over the top above the entrance hole. It often has many feathers and scraps of paper, etc.

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