



# 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*

## RECORDS SOAR — MONITORS & NESTBOXES REACH NEW HEIGHTS Annual Report Featured in This Issue

***A pullout 1997 Annual Report is included in this issue. Monitors' reports rise from 180 in 1996 to over 330 in 1997—Total birds up from 5077 to 8393—Over 2000 more bluebirds reported —Average birds fledged per box increases.***

*by Hatch Graham*

If the California Bluebird Recovery Program traded on the New York Stock Exchange its share price would be nearly doubled. Its customer base—the cavity nesters—increased a whopping 165%. Its employees—the faithful monitors—increased 187%. The productivity measured by nestboxes in the backyards and on the trails was up from 2400 to 3642—152%. This exponential growth can be attributed to the popularity of this form of *effective conservation* spread by word of mouth from each active bluebirder to his or her neighbors.

### **The Heavyweights**

As usual, **Dick Purvis** and his Orange County crew were prominent among the big producers. *Dick fledged an amazing 1238 birds!* Others weighing in in Orange County were **James Cox** with 331 birds, and **Colin Campbell** with 99.

**James A Guthrie**, whose trail is around New Hogan Reservoir in Calaveras, had a whopping 512 birds fledged in spite of losses to predators.

Contra Costa County had its share of sluggers, too: **Warren Engstrom** with 214, **Don Yoder** with 205, and

**Oscar Enstrom** with 125.

In Sutter & Yuba Counties, **Kevin Putman** raised 219 songbirds and 763 Wood Ducks.

In their first year with the Burton Trail, the Siskiyou County group under the leadership of **Mike Hauptman** came through with 203 birds fledged.

The new trail in Nevada County monitored by the **Sierra Foothills Audubon Society** was nursery for 172 fledglings.

From their cattle ranch in Amador County, **Bill & Doris Allison** fledged 125.

### **Box Scores**

We recognize that on average it's sometimes easier to be productive with just one box; especially if the tenants choose to have two clutches. Still, productivity—measured by average fledged per box—is a good indicator of good habitat, good box location, absence of predators, and maybe a tad of good luck. Aside from the Wood Ducks (whose average clutch is 10 to 15), 1997's high productivity record—11 birds from one box—went to **Max Rinaldi**, of El Dorado County. **Gail Walker**, also from El Dorado, had 10 fledge. Sev-

## **NABS meets in Canada this year.**

Regina, Saskatchewan is the site of the 1998 North American Bluebird Society's 21st Annual Meeting.

To be held 25-28 June, the program promises to feature bluebirds and other cavity nesters as well as the history of bluebirding in Saskatchewan.

Numerous exciting field trips are planned. Our Canadian neighbors are set to host bluebirders seeking an educational and scenic vacation.

For detailed information and registration materials, contact NABS, PO Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530.

eral monitors ended up with 7 or 8 fledged—often with the more prolific birds; **Wendy Guglieri** had 6 bluebirds in one box and 8 House Wrens in another.

As you will see in the report, there were over 50 monitors who averaged more than 4 birds per box. That's success by any measure!

### **Counties Count, Too**

Where do our monitors come from. As in the past, the Mother Lode—the foothills of the Sierra—are filled with Bluebirders. El Dorado has 183 reports (more than last year's statewide total). Amador County has 35, Placer has 19. Nevada County probably has more than we show because **Lorry Hukill** reported for 17 neighbors and the **Sierra Foothills Audubon Society** represents a bunch more. Contra

*Continued on page 2*

## **CBRP nestbox banding expands**

A total of 453 cavity nesters were banded in 1997 by CBRP's two banders, **Hatch Graham** & **Dave Delongchamp**, in El Dorado & Amador Counties.

Through a website on the Internet, **Dee Warenycia** of Placer County contacted Hatch, who is a Master Permittee, and through his sponsorship is now licensed to band.

Bluebirders in Placer County and northern Sacramento County should contact Dee as soon as the estimated hatching date is known. Dee, time permitting, will schedule a trip to band when the nestlings are approximately 11 to 14 days old.

The same holds true for the other banders. Monitors in the Georgetown Divide area of El Dorado County should contact **Dave Delongchamp**. Other El Dorado and Amador County monitors call **Hatch Graham**.

*Dee Warenycia—(530)786-5056*

*Dave Delongchamp—(530)333-2304*

*Hatch Graham—(530)621-1833*

We band all cavity nesters. The 1997 totals included 302 Western Bluebirds, 58 Oak Titmice, 28 House Wrens, 21 Ash-throated Flycatchers, 15 Mountain Chickadees, 11 Tree Swallows, and 20 of other species.

If you are interested in becoming a bird bander, contact **Hatch Graham** for further information. All banding activities must be licensed by the Federal and State governments and banders must be skilled in bird identification, meticulous in their record keeping, and dedicated to banding fairly large numbers of birds.

To participate in the cavity nesting banding study requires time and travel to various nestbox sites when the nestling are at the correct age for banding. We hope to hear from a few dedicated monitors.

## **Annual report—**

*continued from page 1*

Costa County showed a great increase in 1997—from 4 reports to 35. (*Nice going, Don. —Ed.*) And Santa Clara's up to 19.

But let's not forget Orange—12 monitors with 2074 birds—Wow!

## **DOES A DOUBLE-THICK ENTRANCE HELP?**

**Wayne Davis** reports in the Winter '98 issue of *Sialia* that earlier studies by **Kevin Berner** et al, show that an extra 3/4" wooden entry over the hole does not deter raccoons.

He further discovered that House Sparrows prefer the thicker entry whereas bluebirds don't seem to care. Seems like the extra thickness doesn't do any good and may encourage sparrows.

## **CBRP'ers in the news**

*Sialia's* latest issue reports on the NABS Speakers' Bureau for 1996. The 329 members of the Speakers' Bureau are bluebirders registered with NABS who present slides and other bluebird programs to various groups. Five of our Californians were active in '96 as reported in the NABS quarterly.

**Susan Yasuda** and **Jim Fletcher** gave 10 programs for Eldorado National Forest and CBRP. Placer County Coordinator **Lesa McDonald-Chan** presented programs to Scout meetings and an Earth Day Fair. Program Director **Don Yoder** traveled over 2000 miles to give 15 programs around the State. As usual, **Viola Sampert** was active in the Georgetown Divide area of El Dorado County and assisted neighboring counties by providing her slides.

Our thanks to all of them. We have many more monitors due to their efforts.

## **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 efforts of volunteers and donations accepted by the Mt. Diablo Audubon Society on CBRP's behalf.

CBRP members had reported on more than 3,600 nestboxes by the end of 1997, with more than 8,000 cavity nesters fledged—nearly 5,400 of them Western and Mountain Bluebirds.

CBRP welcomes membership from the public who wish to support the 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.

CBRP can furnish nestbox plans, a monitoring guide, forms for monitoring and reports, and technical advice through a network of county coordinators.

Membership, which includes the quarterly newsletter is available for a donation of at least \$5 made payable to "MDAS-Bluebirds" and mailed to CBRP, **Don Yoder**, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595. Donations are tax-deductible.

## **California Bluebird Recovery Program**

**Don Yoder, Program Director**

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Don Yoder's

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD




California Bluebird Recovery Program was originated to provide a forum for exchanging information between bluebirders, to communicate common interests and to share experiences of those with whom we would otherwise have no close contacts. The sharing of successes—and problems—lets us enjoy that common interest—even finding solutions to some of the problems.


Reports we have received as another nesting season ends show a great variance of such successes at fledgling production. A few monitors report 'no takers' this year, but all show a continuing interest in hoping for a better year in '98.




Here's gratitude for you: **Nan Carlton**, Lake County, regularly has 2 pair of bluebirds nesting near her home. But they choose the blue oak tree and ignore boxes she has placed for their use and convenience.




**Judith Burkhardt**, San Luis Obispo, reported early in September, delighted at her success in fledging 13 Western Bluebirds in her first year in the Program. The total would have been higher had not an ant invasion killed four youngsters. Even a Great Horned Owl, using a nestbox as a perch, did not ward off the attack.




**Barbara Ingle**, El Dorado, mounted a box in April but had no takers; she hopes for better results in 1998.




Bluebirds are a friendly lot: **Lloyd Cook**, Shasta, had one land on his head while he was checking a box. He believes that a second nesting attempt was by young birds of a first clutch. (*Young birds help feed but can't yet breed or lay eggs. —Ed.*)




**We Pia Gah Camp Fire Group**, Los Angeles, fledged 7 more bluebirds than last year, even with minor losses. They had no stolen or vandalized boxes caused by THA's (talking hairless apes) this year.




In their own words, "1997 was a frustrating year!" according to **Bill & Doris Allison**, Amador County. Others may have the same opinion upon reviewing their own records. Out of 30 nesting attempts by bluebirds, Doris reports only 17 were successful: a variety of predators seeming to cause the heavy losses.



The same frustration came to **Jim Guthrie**, Calaveras County, who reports loss of 75 bluebirds to predators this year. In 1996, 10 boxes produced 68 birds; in 1997, only 7. Feral cats and coons harassed the birds in spite of attached Noel guards. He had good luck with slot boxes, but is going to hang his boxes from trees in '98.




We can only reflect on a statement about the environment by a cancer treatment survivor who asked for nestbox plans. She said "When you have faced death, little things become more important and meaningful to you." She is now more aware and appreciative of the plant and bird inhabitants of her L.A. garden. She sees a variety of birds, some of which she cannot identify, and plans to totally birdscape the area by next year. Good luck, **Sharon**, to you and your project.




Real competition for use of nestboxes was evident in the yard of **Mary Mollett**. Calaveras, where three boxes were available for rent. One box produced one brood. Aggressive


action by hawks took the female but Ash-throated Flycatchers, House Finches and Oak Titmice took over houses thwarting future attempts by the bluebirds.




**P.C. "Red" Pendleton**, manages trails in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties since 1986, involves a Scout troop, and has reported on bluebird production for the first time. Golf courses receive major attention and have proven productive, though figures could be better except for vandalism. Boxes are also available for Wood Ducks. Scouts do a good job but move on to college and slowly lose interest (*and no doubt, time. —Ed.*)



Bluebirds scored a victory for **Rachel Talbot**, Amador, when they built a nest on top of an active House Wren nest and fledged 6 blue ones. Hooray for the blues! And she found that nesting cavities need not be only of wood. Rachel is building a steel frame house. Construction noise and activity did not deter a pair of blues who built in a steel header and fledged. She enclosed pictures showing a lot of 'blue' activity.



**June C. Persson**, Sutter, couldn't count the bluebird fledglings from a natural cavity 20 feet up in snags. One pair nested above one of her boxes that had tree swallows as tenants. Two other bluebird pairs also nested in the Bob Elaine Research Area cavities.



Monitoring isn't scientific but it is interesting and full of surprises; each trip along the trail may prove the point. **Cathie Tritel**, Placer, reports one attempt and 6 Western Kingbirds fledged. Wonder whether

*continued on page 5*



## Oak Titmouse decline noted

Garth Harwood writes from Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society: "We've been combing through our old data files from Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)—Audubon's century-old annual survey of local birdlife, now regarded as one of the best sources for local population trends available anywhere.

"Turns out that the Western Bluebird has been holding its own in this locality for the past 28 years. The big news is that the cavity-nesting species that is in the most trouble in the greater San Jose area is the Oak (formerly Plain) Titmouse. In our local area, titmice appear to be in a 4% decline annually."

**BLUEBIRDS FLY!** checked back with Garth regarding the Santa Clara data. Volunteer **William G. (Bill) Bousman** has reviewed the 3 census circles in the Santa Clara area (Palo Alto, San Jose, and Mt. Hamilton), normalized them to account for different survey party hours, etc., and to come up with statistically sound comparisons.

The two principal census methods used nationally are the CBC and the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) which began in 1966.

Criticisms of the CBC have been based on the extreme variations in numbers and ability of observers in each Christmas count. With statisticians like Bousman to lend a hand, the "normalized" data from the CBC becomes much more meaningful.

The BBS is more controlled. The route is set. The time at each count point is precisely regulated. The observer is presumably a trained birder, with song recognition abilities and visual expertise.

Even with these standardizations, many statisticians have problems with both census methods because of recognizable variability among

the "expert" birders.

Still, because it's a constant and consistent monitoring of given geographical areas, the CBC is, as Garth has said, one of the best sources of local population trends.

We checked with information on the Internet from the BBS to see if there was any correlation with the local CBC data. [The CBC has not been entered in the database at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center beyond 1988 though it is expected to be available in early Spring.]

Sure enough, the BBS shows a significant Statewide decline for the Oak Titmouse over the 31 years it's been operating but barely over half of San Jose's 68% loss.

For the 12 years from 1966 through 1978, the average decline in California was calculated at 0.6% per year or 7.0% over the period; but the bad news is that in the next 17 years, 1979-1996, the decline jumped to 1.9% per year or 27.8%. The total decline, then, would be 34.8% if there weren't a quirk in statistical analysis: the 66-79 figures were not as significant as the 80-96 figures. In total, the 1966-96 figures are significant and amount to a -1.5% for the 29 years; that is, a 35.4% loss.

While we can't be happy about this state of affairs, we appreciate the opportunity to alert our readers. Perhaps we can redouble our efforts to help this worthy cavity nester.

Oak Titmice rely on their oak woodland habitat. If you have Western Bluebirds nesting in oaks, try pairing a second nestbox for the titmice. They coexist well together.

Another finding in Santa Clara County is the invasion of the Nuttall's Woodpecker. It was not recorded in Palo Alto prior to 1970! It has increased in the Palo Alto and San Jose areas but not in the Diablo range.

## What about the others?

So the Oak Titmouse is declining (see article to the left). But what about some of the other cavity nesters?

We checked *The North American Breeding Bird Survey Results and Analysis*. 1997, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD by Sauer, J.R., J.E.Hines, G. Gough, I.Thomas, & B.G. Peterjohn.

Here are some of the other cavity nesters of interest to our readers with the trend and the 29-year change in relative abundance (see article on page 10).

Species	Trend	Change
Wood Duck	+6.5	621%
Mtn Bluebird	+6.4	604%
W-b Nuthatch	+4.1	321%
Tree Swallow	+2.1	83%
Ash-t Flycatcher	+1.2	41%
House Wren	+1.0	33%
Nuttall's Wdpr	+0.9	30%
Acorn Wdpr	+0.4	12%
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House Sparrow	-0.3	- 8%
R-b Nuthatch	-0.4	-11%
Western Bluebd	-0.9	-23%
B-c Chickadee	-1.2	-30%
Oak Titmouse	-1.5	-35%
Mtn Chickadee	-1.5	-35%
V-g Swallow	-1.8	-41%
Amer. Kestrel	-2.0	-44%
C-b Chickadee	-2.3	-49%
Bewick's Wren	-2.3	-49%
Com. Barn Owl	-4.7	-78%

### Monitoring booklet is still available—order now

The 32-page booklet, *Monitoring Your Bluebird Trail in California*, can still be obtained from **Hatch Graham**.

Procedures for when and how to monitor, preventing nest failures, estimating hatching date, and visual aging of nestlings are all explained. Send a \$3 donation to receive your copy postpaid.

Don Yoder's

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

*continued from page 3*

she got her field guide out to identify that one? (*We reported them as Ash-throated Flycatchers. —Ed.*)



**Warren Engstrom**, Contra Costa, has a thriving population of Ash-throated Flycatchers but these and other varieties suffered reduced numbers due to predation. Many cases of grass instead of young birds sticking out of the entrance hole.



Protective measures prove their worth, even though fledged numbers are unproven. **Dorothy Henney**, Lake, hangs 3 boxes above convenient monitoring levels but notices increased adult 'protectivity' when Tree Swallows are fledging (a good spot for the Purvis hanging nestbox lifter).



Just how many new box designs do you encounter in a year? **Howard Rathlesberger**, San Mateo, enclosed colored photos of a drop-side (basically NABS) design box wherein the side is pivoted below the floor level. Varied box hook suspensions have also proven useful for him.



On a personal note, your Program Director was recently recognized by North American Bluebird Society "For Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Bluebird Conservation." and received a plaque as evidence of that award. It is considered an award to the Program and is shared by all who have participated in our conservation effort and contributed many hours of hard labor and effort in furtherance of our aims. It hangs on our wall, with thanks to all of the unnamed individuals referred to above.



**Dee Warenycia**, Placer, monitors four trails near Roseville. and indi-

cated their detailed locations via Geological Survey maps. Any map reader could undoubtedly go directly to any trail and carry on her inspections.



Reports of pleasurable observations of activity by **John & Mary Zotalis**, Nevada Co, may have been possible by reducing troublesome infestations of nests through use of Tangle Foot® on metal posts supporting boxes. They report it is effective.



**Lorry Hukill**, Nevada, reports a bad year in her area, both for bluebirds fledging and for reporting by associate owners. Some blues did look-ins at her boxes but declined the spaces offered.



Wasps deterred Violet-green Swallows from a box placed by **Nancy Slenger**, Amador, but bluebirds found five other boxes to their liking, along with Ash-throated Flycatchers.



**Dick & Lee McDowell**, Orange, wonder if their 27 boxes (fledged 65 Western Bluebirds) are properly termed a 'trail'? The term was originally applied to a string of 5 or more boxes placed along a continuous route of travel. It is a subjective term and, although scattered, a number of boxes under one management could really be termed a trail.



Maybe you thought you had problems raising bluebirds: **Donald Johnson**, Kern, reports that inadequate records were kept on about 20 boxes located at scattered residents' properties. He knows of 7 bluebird pairs that nested. But a local youth group's leader suggested that the kids "gather bird nests...."

Four boys found 2 trails and removed 3 nests with 18 bluebird eggs .... Don reports, "This situation has now been corrected." Nearby construction also resulted in the abandonment of other nests.



Someone has asked whether bluebirds will nest in a box attached to a building? We've read of such an occurrence, but now we've nailed down evidence to confirm it by observation. **Dorothy Bummer**, Kern, forwarded a colored photograph of a nestbox attached to an open out-facing gable. A bluebird is to be seen surveying the scene outdoors, apparently about to try his wings and see the world.



Other species will also accept proximity to human habitation: **Jackie Foott**, Contra Costa, had kestrels nesting for the second year in an owl box on the side of her house. Could there have been a contest for the space between the two?



Early prospects of a great fledging season faded rapidly for **Monty Loyd**, Fresno. Boxes fairly bulged with birds and eggs. Then without cold, wet weather or signs of predation, a number of nests were abandoned, before and after egg laying took place.



**Nancy Lee Getman**, El Dorado, rescued a hungry hatchling whose nest home fell from a tree and who survived mauling by terriers, placing the little one into a bluebird box with 5 youngsters. The 'stranger' was 1/3 larger than the resident 5, but, not to worry: the blues' parents accepted the new guest with great hospitality and added work. All six fledged. Descriptions of the guest

*continued on page 8*

## Heavyweight & lightweight boxers score knockouts—birds win!

Through efforts of many nestbox builders and donations of much needed material, CBRP's trails have grown rapidly. A view at the 1997 annual report included in this issue of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!* shows a 150% increase in nestboxes.

Many of these are purchased at stores affiliated with **Wild Birds Unlimited**, a member of CBRP. They provide well-constructed nestboxes. But many more are built and donated by dedicated woodworkers who advance the cause of cavity nesters throughout the State.

For example, **Howard Rathlesberger**, Coordinator for San Mateo County, reports that Boy Scouts under the direction of "**Red**" **Pendleton** have built over 120 boxes which are on trails around Stanford U, the Los Altos and Stanford Golf Courses, on Mt Hamilton and in Portola Valley. Some of these are monitored by **Santa Clara Audubon** members.

Howard's own trails are all home-made boxes which number over 40. His material comes from **Lucy Tolmach**, Supt. of Gardens at Filoli, an ardent supporter of the Bluebird Program.

Also in San Mateo, **Evelyn DeGhetaldi's** husband is supplying boxes for her trail being established near Olympic Golf Club in Daly City. And **Sue Cossins** of **Sequoia Audubon** delivered Howard enough 8" fence boards for another 20 nestboxes.

**Oscar Enstrom**, Coordinator in Contra Costa Co, reports that **John A. Ray** of Walnut Creek has offered to build houses for him to put up.

Have you noticed the number of monitors from El Dorado County? Many of them were not only recruited

by **Viola Sampert**, **Jim Fletcher**, and **Hatch Graham**, but they were supplied nestboxes as well. Jim makes a beautiful pine box patterned after the Cornell Lab of Ornithology box which Cornell sells for \$19.95. Jim's boxes have all the deluxe features. He's given out over 40 boxes.

Viola is first and foremost a talented woodcarver. She has a spacious shop and teaches woodcarving classes where she often recruits monitors as well as box builders. She's given out about 175 boxes in the last four years.

She sold **Growlersburg Conservation Camp** on making 175 boxes for the CBRP program in 1997. They'll be available for distribution soon. **Zen Fuller** is the Shop Supervisor.

**Eric Loeder** built 100 boxes! They're on the trails.

Viola located two friends and neighbors, **Fred Eichman** and **Al Hambrick**, who will be producing nestboxes for the program.

Hatch, who struggled 10 years building his own cabin home in the woods, found he had all the tools to make nestboxes. He advertised

through "Wanted" poster at stores and received many donations of exterior plywood, redwood fence-boards, replaced decking, and old barn siding. He alters the design to fit the lumber but essentially builds the standard NABS side-opener (after Zeleny), as does Viola. The recycled material has come from **Debbie See**, **Julie & Cal Ellis**, **Cass & Dave Draxler**, **Mary & John Hess**, **Pat & Chuck Butterfield**, **Jean Ellis**, **Nancy Getman**, **Debbie Crittenden**, all who have become monitors, and several others. He figures he's set out and/or provided 480 boxes since 1994. They were distributed in Amador and El Dorado Counties and, in the process, other box building monitors were recruited, including **Al Jones**, **Stan Watson**, **Frank Welch**, **Eric Hess**, **Carla Cooper & Girl Scout Troop 1019**, and **Henry Ratz** who's been distributing boxes for years.

For the 1998 season, Hatch is requesting a \$5 donation to CBRP for each box, "With quantity discounts," he says. "We need the monitors first." He recently sent in donations for 10 more boxes placed near Lake Tahoe and in the Hwy 88 corridor in Amador.

Not to be outdone—besides his own trails with 300+ boxes—Orange Co. Coordinator, **Dick Purvis**, has built and given away several hundred boxes.

Our Program Director, **Don Yoder**, says he's provided about 75 boxes to others. (*I'll bet Don's forgotten about all the kits he's delivered to youth groups and others to get them started. Sometimes it's hard to keep track. —Ed.*)

CBRP's thanks to everyone and forgive us if we missed you.

### Indian Chant

NOW IN THE EAST  
THE WHITE BEAN  
& THE GREAT CORN PLANT  
ARE TIED WITH WHITE LIGHTNING.  
LISTEN! RAIN'S DRAWING NEAR!  
THE VOICE OF THE BLUEBIRD IS HEARD.

NOW IN THE EAST  
THE WHITE BEAN  
& THE GREAT CORN PLANT  
ARE TIED WITH THE RAINBOW.  
LISTEN! THE RAIN'S DRAWING NEAR!  
THE VOICE OF THE BLUEBIRD IS HEARD.

*from the Navajo (c. 1794)*



# ARE YOUR BOXES SAFE FROM PREDATORS? HANG 'EM HIGH

We've written about **Dick Purvis's** success with his hanging nestboxes and box lifter a number of times. Not only does Dick have extensive trails but he has a higher (than average) success ratio than most bluebirders. Dick averages 4 to 5 birds per box. This, compared to the Statewide average of 2.3. Dick attributes the success to his method—which puts the nestboxes out of reach of the common predators: cats, raccoons, and kids.

Dick's system works well in the manicured parks, golf courses, and cemeteries in Southern California. **Hatch Graham** has tried it in blue oaks in the Central California foothills and finds that some pruning is necessary to clear a spot on a branch for easy access.

Dick's design for the box is shown to the right. He mounts the hanger in the middle as shown. **Howard Rathlesberger** has the hook made of wires attached to both sides of the box.

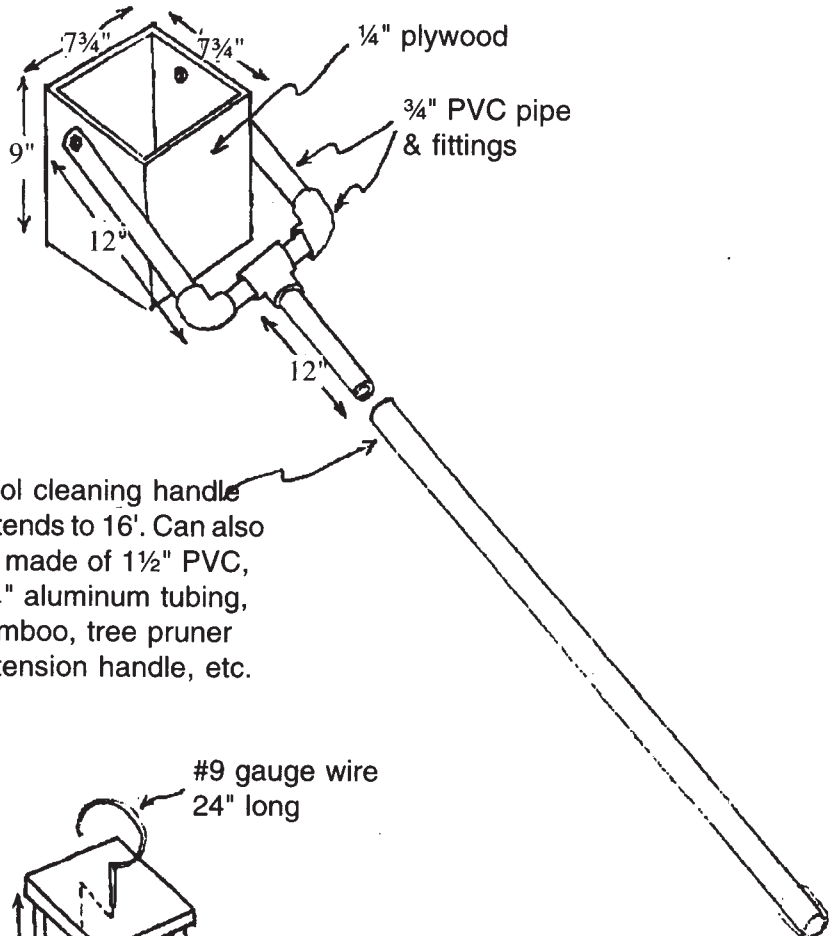
On the other hand, Hatch makes a curved semi-bail that is attached on the back of the box and curves up and forward over the front of the box to accommodate the heavier branches in the oak trees.

He uses #9 wire as Dick does and forms the curve around a 7" jar. The high point of the curve is over the

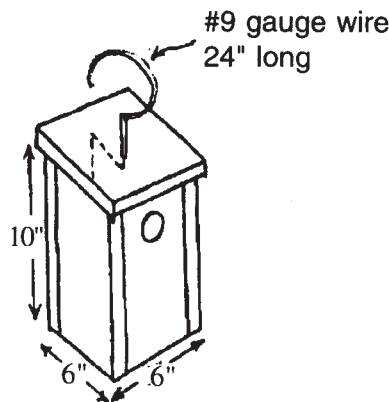
midpoint of the box so the box hangs straight. The base of the wire is bent and peened square in a vise and inserted in the back of the box. Then the extension is bent up before the

box is assembled. A groove is cut in the center of the back overhang of the roof to keep the hanger from moving laterally. A staple at the top will also work.

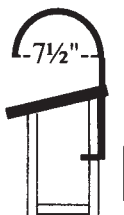
## PURVIS'S HANGING NESTBOX & BOX LIFTER



Pool cleaning handle extends to 16'. Can also be made of 1 1/2" PVC, 1 1/4" aluminum tubing, bamboo, tree pruner extension handle, etc.



HANGING NESTBOX



Dick Purvis Jan 1996

## NOTES

*continued from page 5*

sound like it was an American Robin. Now just how did he exit that 'little round hole'? (*Maybe the baby blues pushed him out.* —Ed.)



**John Winegar**, El Dorado, had 3 bluebird attempted nestings and thinks all would have been successful—had not the Gray Squirrels harassed the blues beyond endurance at one of the boxes. Life can be really rough. (*How about a dog on a leash, John?*)



Reflections in the windows of **Gary Cramer's** new house in El Dorado County attracted bluebirds who insisted on defending their territory against "those other birds." Gary put up with the attacks until the youngsters fledged—then gave both boxes to a neighbor. (*Be sure to get the neighbor's Form 2 next year, Hatch.*)



One of the most active and successful independent state bluebird organizations has to be the **Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis**, the coordinating facility for their 62 counties. From 8166 boxes covered in 331 reports they fledged 10,058 bluebirds. As we read those figures, we see their average is only 1.23 birds per box whereas, here in California, our average is almost twice as good—2.3 birds per box.

We might infer that careful placement of boxes in good habitat can result in a higher percentage of birds per box. Now we should increase our boxes to increase our production.



The same Program publishes a quality newsletter (almost as good as **BLUEBIRDS FLY!**). The November issue quoted our own **Hatch Graham** who debunked the idea that predators

*Continued on page 12*

## 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.



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.

## No House Wren trapping, please

In the last issue of **BLUEBIRDS FLY!**, we wrote about concerns expressed by many that favoring House Wrens was detrimental to other cavity nesters. In order to provide information on the House Wren's behavior we quoted from **S. Pribil's** studies in Canada. Pribil is a scientist studying the House Wren. He's devised a trap based on the wren's egg-pecking proclivities. We gave readers no information on the trap itself, since trapping is restricted to bird banders licensed under federal permit from the US Dept of the Interior or the Canadian Wildlife Service. Trapping any native birds, otherwise, is clearly illegal. (Only the non-native House Sparrows and European Starlings are legal.)

Nevertheless, we received messages from readers whom we hold in high regard wondering if we had given the impression House Wrens should be trapped to save the bluebirds.

If so, not intended! Pribil's studies gave more details on the spacing of nestboxes to avoid wren predation and some insight into reasons bluebirds may successfully compete with wrens under some situations.

Anyone considering illegal trapping of our native cavity nesters, forget it! —Ed.

## Contra Costa County Supervisor lauds program

After reading an excellent article in the *Contra Costa Times*, District Supervisor **Donna Gerber** wrote to **Don Yoder**, "The establishment of the California Bluebird Recovery Program and the efforts of its 180 volunteers to maintain bluebird nestboxes throughout California is work for which we all owe you a great debt of gratitude."



## RELATIVE ABUNDANCE—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Western Bluebirds are declining. Oak Titmice are declining. Neotropical birds may be declining. What does it mean? Declining from what? Do satellites count all the birds? How do we know how many birds are out there? Does a decline mean they're threatened, endangered?

So far science has not come up with a method of counting total numbers of most species. So total numbers are not known despite efforts such as Cornell Laboratory's Project FeederWatch, Audubon's Christmas and Summer Bird Counts, and the Department of the Interior's Breeding Bird Surveys. Each of these samples give a measure of relative abundance at the sample site from

year to year.

Still, the relative abundance allows us to learn about trends in populations. Had we had the information we have today in the late 1800s, we might have headed off the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and the Carolina Parakeet.

The Breeding Bird Survey, by locating its survey routes strategically and weighting results by physiographic provinces, has developed relative abundance of birds by province for the period 1982-1996.

Ten physiographic strata occur in California. Eastside types include Great Basin Deserts, Sonoran Desert, Mojave Desert, Pitt-Klamath Plateau. Other strata also occurring in South-

ern California are Southern California Grasslands and Los Angeles Ranges. The Southern Pacific Rainforests occur coastally from the Bay Area north; and the Sierra Nevada, California Foothills, and Central Valley make up the remainder.

The surveyor records at 50 points for exactly 3 minutes every half mile for a total of 2.5 hours of intensive birding. These figures represent the number you might see along a 25 mile stretch of road on an early morning in June. 5.0 means about 2 per hour. 22.0 means a pair might be encountered every 15 minutes or so. A fraction like 0.3 means you might only see 1 bird of the species every 3 or 4 years.

### Ash-throated Flycatcher:

Sierra Nevada	0.1
Sonoran Desert	8.9
Mojave Desert	8.5
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	5.4
So. Cal. Grasslands	11.2
Central Valley	1.3
California Foothills	22.6
S. Pacific Rainforest	3.3
Los Angeles Ranges	19.1

### Tree Swallow:

Sierra Nevada	1.5
Mojave Desert	0.03
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	5.6
So. Cal. Grasslands	0.3
Central Valley	2.3
California Foothills	2.5
S. Pacific Rainforest	4.2
Los Angeles Ranges	0.03

### Violet-green Swallow:

Sierra Nevada	0.8
Sonoran Desert	0.4
Mojave Desert	0.08
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	3.0
So. Cal. Grasslands	1.0
Central Valley	0.9
California Foothills	9.7
S. Pacific Rainforest	10.0
Los Angeles Ranges	36.8

### Black-capped Chickadee:

Pitt-Klamath Plateau	0.02
S. Pacific Rainforest	0.05

### Mountain Chickadee:

Sierra Nevada	28.4
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	16.9
So. Cal. Grasslands	0.02
California Foothills	3.1
S. Pacific Rainforest	1.1
Los Angeles Ranges	35.7

### Chestnut-backed Chickadee:

Sierra Nevada	0.08
---------------	------

California Foothills	1.7
S. Pacific Rainforest	13.9

### Oak Titmouse:\*

Sierra Nevada	0.1
So. Cal. Grasslands	3.9
Central Valley	0.5
California Foothills	21.1
S. Pacific Rainforest	1.3
Los Angeles Ranges	10.5

### Juniper Titmouse:\*

Sonoran Desert	0.2
Mojave Desert	0.02

### Red-breasted Nuthatch:

Sierra Nevada	17.6
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	0.06
California Foothills	1.2
S. Pacific Rainforest	5.7
Los Angeles Ranges	2.0

### White-breasted Nuthatch:

Sierra Nevada	1.2
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	3.5
So. Cal. Grasslands	0.4
Central Valley	0.06
California Foothills	7.8
S. Pacific Rainforest	0.6
Los Angeles Ranges	6.6

### Pygmy Nuthatch:

Sierra Nevada	0.7
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	1.9
California Foothills	1.4
S. Pacific Rainforest	0.6
Los Angeles Ranges	20.7

### Bewick's Wren:

Sierra Nevada	0.6
Great Basin Deserts	0.5
Sonoran Desert	0.4
Mojave Desert	0.6
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	3.3
So. Cal. Grasslands	18.9

\*Estimate based on surveys of the Plain Titmouse before the species split.

Central Valley	0.3
California Foothills	9.6
S. Pacific Rainforest	2.3
Los Angeles Ranges	9.4

### House Wren:

Sierra Nevada	2.7
Great Basin Deserts	0.3
Mojave Desert	0.02
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	8.1
So. Cal. Grasslands	7.4
Central Valley	0.5
California Foothills	12.0
S. Pacific Rainforest	1.6
Los Angeles Ranges	6.7

### Western Bluebird:

Sierra Nevada	0.2
Mojave Desert	0.02
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	1.0
So. Cal. Grasslands	1.9
Central Valley	0.6
California Foothills	8.9
S. Pacific Rainforest	1.4
Los Angeles Ranges	13.8

### Mountain Bluebird:

Sierra Nevada	0.9
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	3.1

### House Sparrow:

Sierra Nevada	0.4
Great Basin Deserts	3.6
Sonoran Desert	54.5
Mojave Desert	28.3
Pitt-Klamath Plateau	20.7
So. Cal. Grasslands	49.4
Central Valley	109.5
California Foothills	17.1
S. Pacific Rainforest	3.4
Los Angeles Ranges	2.2

It's hard to miss the House Sparrows isn't it?

Derived from National Biological Survey  
on the World Wide Web at  
<http://www.mbr.nbs.gov/id/check/14.html>

## NO TREES FOR HANGING? THEN ELEVATE THE POLE

If you have a predator problem with a trail of nestboxes mounted on a fence line and there are no trees nearby or an insufficient number for your boxes, you may want to try elevator poles.

Originally conceived by Paul Chance and published in *Sialia*, Paul's poles were made of PVC pipe. He nested a 1½" piece of pipe into a 2" piece. PVC works well but is slightly more costly than electrical metal tubing (EMT) or thin-wall pipe as it's sometimes called.

A lot of trail operators believe EMT is ideal for discouraging climbing predators. Nestboxes are mounted on 10 ft sections of pipe. The problem with a 10 ft high pole is the difficulty in monitoring. It's okay in a backyard with a ladder handy but Chance's idea of telescoping the pole makes it very simple to monitor while keeping the box out-of-reach of the varmints. And it can be located in rough terrain without worrying about ladders.

The elevator pole is not as vandal-free as the hanging box, but it may be less susceptible to ant attack.

If you have suffered from raccoons, snakes, or cats, you may want to try the Purvis hanging box and lifter (pg 7) or Chance's elevator pole as shown here.

There are several ways of attaching the pipe to the pole. Most simply drill through the pipe and then use 2 screws to go into the back of the box.

**Hatch Graham** actually drills a 5/8" hole in the center back edge of the floor to accommodate the ½" pipe, uses a pipe clamp on the inside of the back and drills a hole through the back of the box into the pipe as well. This is only practical when building the box from scratch, according to Hatch.

It's important to remove the back

extension from the standard side-opening NABS box or the extension will stop the telescoping action before the box is lowered down to 4½'

for ideal viewing height.

Both this plan and the hanging box do away with the need for wire guards or extended roof overhang.

### CHANCE'S ELEVATOR POLE WITH STANDARD NESTBOX

modified by H. Graham

#### Bill of Material:

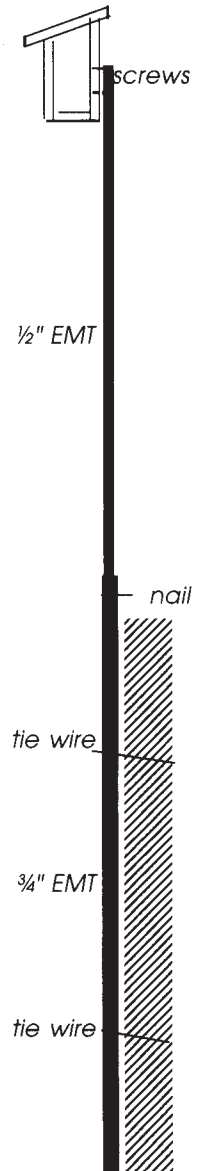
- 1 5' section ½" EMT pipe
- 1 4½' section ¾" EMT pipe
- 1 16d nail
- 1 standard side-opening nestbox for Western Bluebirds (NABS after Zeleny). Back extension unnecessary.
- 2 1" deck screws
- 2 10" pieces black tie wire (baling wire)

#### Instructions:

1. Affix ½" pipe to back of nestbox with the 2 deck screws (predrill holes in the pipe).
2. Firmly attach ¾" pipe to studded-T fencepost (or wooden post) with wire.
3. Insert smaller pipe into larger pipe about 3".
4. Orient nestbox in proper direction (away from prevailing storms).
5. Drill holes through both pipes with 3/8" bit.
6. Lock two pipes in place with 16d nail.
7. Mark pipes to easily locate matching holes.

#### To Operate:

1. Remove nail.
2. Slide upper pipe down into lower pipe.
3. Open side-opening box, inspect nest, eggs, & chicks.
4. Close box; record.
5. Raise upper pipe and box until marks are visible.
6. Lock pipes in place with nail.



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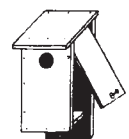
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This Space  
Waiting for  
You to Volunteer

Uncle Don  
Wants You!





# NOTES

*continued from page 8*

find occupied nestboxes merely by following the scent of the monitors directly to the boxes. MN came to be a good source of information on anything having to do with monitoring and bluebirds in general. We are most fortunate to have Hatch inputting so much for our own Program.



And not wanting MN to get all of the goodies, *Bluebirds Across Nebraska* Newsletter for Fall '97 (Vol. 4 No. 3) also carried the same article. Some people just seem to know a good thing when it is offered to them.



Another vigorous state organization, the **Ohio Bluebird Society**, is now just past its 10th anniversary. Their 88 counties list 39 County Coordinators and, like CA, are looking for additional monitors to fill in the vacancies. With 88 counties in a state the size of Ohio

(27.3% of CA), the territory should be pretty well covered.



Check our Coordinators roster, included in this newsletter (Pg 11). If your county is not listed, step forward to offer your help. CBRP is 3½ years old, covers 58 counties and boasts 40 coordinators in 34 counties. Yes, you can certainly help. There are 24 vacancies. Contact the Director to get a firm grip on the new nesting season.



At their recent Statewide conference Ohio Society's **Dick Tuttle** pointed out, "When you put up a bluebird house you enter into an agreement with the bluebird that you will protect it," (*BAN Newsletter cited above*). This is a commitment to be taken seriously by all birders, and applies to all species—not just bluebirds.



We cite the above publications to bring awareness to our readers that ours

is not the only effort being made on behalf of bluebirds and various cavity nesters. Much work and effort is being expended across the country to protect and propagate various feathered friends—and those who are so engaged are sharing our same interests in such undertakings. We are all in it together.

Let's make it as productive as we can.



We were sorry to learn of difficulties from a number of our consistently faithful bluebirders (**Tom Hoffman, Barbara Moore**, et al) who couldn't monitor last year because of a variety of personal difficulties—flood, business commitments, health, etc.,—but who called or wrote to wish for better this year. We can't prevent floods but your County Coordinators are there to try to get substitutes during vacations or otherwise help out. Call on them. As we said, they are listed on page 11. And your efforts in the past are deeply appreciated.

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A donation of \$5 will extend your subscription for a year.

*Newsletter*

California Bluebird Recovery Program's

# BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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