



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

SPRING HAS SPRUNG & HERE COME THE BIRDS!

New arrivals every day. Get your forms in order. Check your boxes weekly.

Fred Pilot called to say the 4 boxes he shares with neighbors Vaughn & Terri Hintze had 3 bluebirds nesting after nothing last year.

Robert Hall reports that Tree Swallows and Western Bluebirds were fighting over his boxes on Chance's elevator poles. The bluebirds were winning. He quickly purchased a couple more boxes to pair for the swallows.

Dee Warenycia reports her first Oak Titmouse egg.

Sadly, Dianne McCleery has found 3 dead bluebirds in her five boxes in the last week (3/14-21). And Bill Singley discovered an adult female dead in a nestbox in February. She had been banded as a nestling last July in another of Bill's boxes about 250 yds away.

But the fact remains, the nesting season has begun in earnest and monitors need to be up and about.

Many of you have already copied CBRP Form 1 which was included in the last newsletter on the back of the annual report. If you missed it, there's another in this issue. Remember to copy one for each of the boxes you monitor. (*I recommend copying on green paper. It's easier on the eyes in the bright sun.*—Ed.)

Early spring monitoring often finds the paper wasps and other vespids nesting before the birds ar-

rive. It's imperative that you remove them or the birds will not attempt to nest. Use a spatula to try to smash the adult. If she gets away, she'll be back the next day rebuilding. A liberal application of petroleum jelly in the area where the nest has been attached may discourage them. If they still persist, try leaving the door open for two or three days and hope they'll give up before the birds arrive.

The "open door policy" often works with masses of earwigs which also seem to deter bird nest building, even though, singly, the birds will eat earwigs.

Remember, we welcome all native cavity nesters. And, if you're in Amador, El Dorado or Placer County, the bird banders would like to hear from you as soon as you can calculate the estimated hatching date for any of your birds. The current banders are listed on page 15.

We may have banders in Sutter/ Yuba, Nevada, and Mendocino Counties before the season is over. Call Hatch Graham if you have birds to band in those areas.

Your County Coordinators (CoCos) are listed on page 15, also. If you have problems, call them. We're a Statewide team and we need to work together to make the Program a success. If you're going on vacation for more than 10 days, recruit a neighbor to monitor in your absence, or call your coordinator for help.

More nestboxes and birds reported for 1997

Donald L. Dahlsten, Professor in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at UC Berkeley, apologized for his late reports but is tasked to write the two monographs for *The Birds of North America* on the Mountain Chickadee and the Chestnut-backed Chickadee and has the additional duties of Associate Dean.

Don has been studying chickadees for over 30 years as biological controls on forest insects. He has concrete nestboxes with 32mm holes (about 1 1/4").

His boxes are located in Alameda, El Dorado, and Kern Counties; he has 50 in Tilden Park, 125 at Blodgett Experimental Forest, and 142 at Pine Mtn. Here are his totals:

<u>Tilden:</u>		
Species	Tries	Fledged
CBCH:	19	52
OATI:	2	3
VGSW:	6	22
HOWR:	1	10
Total		87
<u>Blodgett:</u>		
MOCH:	12	66
CBCH:	4	19
Total		84
<u>Pine Mt.:</u>		
MOCH:	24	91
PYNU:	9	29
VGSW:	9	25
OATI:	4	21
HOWR:	2	11
WBNU:	1	0
Total		177
Grand Total:		348

Don has promised a story on his activities for a future issue of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!* We look forward to it. These are some of the oldest continuously monitored cavity nesting trails in the State.

Have you seen mighty mite?

Finally! It is mid-season 1997, and nestbox P-04 is occupied by a pair of Tree Swallows, evidenced by the large, white feathers found within. A week later, 6 pure white eggs are revealed when the female flies out as the nestbox is opened. Two weeks after, hidden within their featherbed, are 5 day-old swallows and an unhatched egg!

This nestbox, which the swallows have been arguing over since the beginning of the season, looks like it will produce a fine clutch of fledglings.

During monitoring the following week, the chicks look fine and are growing normally. However, by the next box check, a week later, 2 chicks are noticeably smaller and another is dead!

While handling one of the larger 2 chicks, I notice movement among the feathers...then, I notice tiny red things crawling over my hands and arms! MITES! What should I do?

I decide to let "nature take its course." A week later, I find the 2 smaller tree swallows dead in the

We must look like a tanager

Our face is red! In the last Winter Issue of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!*, we had several mistakes for which we apologize. **Kathy Aldrich**, reporting from Tuolumne, was misidentified as "Keith" in the Annual Report. **Eugene Loeder**, master box builder from Hayward, came out as "Eric." We dropped the last digit on **Mike Hauptman's** fax number under Siskiyou County on pg 11; it's 2.

We double-counted the monitors from Contra Costa, there were 12. And the chickadees reported there were most likely Chestnut-backed.

The drill bit for the elevator poles should be 3/16" not 3/8".

Sorry.

— Ed.

nest, and the larger 2 have presumably fledged. While cleaning out this messy nest, I wonder what I could have done differently....

As the season progressed, I found that, although only 23% of my swallow nests were infested with mites, I lost 83% of my nestlings in those infested nests. At one site that I monitor, I lost 1/3 of my swallow nestlings (all from mite-infested nests). On the other hand, 50% of my Ash-throated Flycatcher nests were infested (although the infestation was light), and they suffered no known losses.

I remembered corresponding in 1996 with **Jan Wasserman**, a Ventura County nestbox monitor, whose nestboxes are occupied almost exclusively by Tree Swallows. She reported high losses in her nestboxes that had mites. Of 50 boxes she monitored in one area, 15 had swallow clutches that hatched. Of these 15, 9 boxes had moderate to heavy mite infestation. Of the 37 birds that hatched in these boxes, 19 died (50% mortality!). During the following winter, she removed her boxes and washed them out with liquid Sevin®. Fortunately for her (and her Tree Swallows!), only a few nests were lightly-infested during the 1997 season, and losses were minimal.

With the start of the 1998 season, I am already wondering what my approach will be if I discover mite-infested nests. And, I am also wondering...have any other monitors encountered mites? If you have, what has been your approach? I would like to hear from any of you who have experienced mites in your nestboxes, to hear your story. If this truly is a widespread problem, we'll follow up, perhaps with suggested solutions! Write *BLUEBIRDS FLY!* or me.

Dee Warenycia
warbler5@aol.com

104 Stratford Court, Roseville, CA 95661

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 located and reported on 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 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.

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

Membership, which includes this quarterly newsletter is available for a donation of \$5 or more made payable to "MDAS—Bluebirds" and mailed to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595. Donations are tax-deductible.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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“SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW...”

by Dean E. Sheldon, Jr.

...bluebirds fly.” —Ah, yes.... But how many fly?

One of bluebirding's greatest conundrums has to do with the numbers of young birds which actually leave the nestbox fledging into the outside world. Even the most experienced bluebirders will tell you that they rarely see an actual fledging take place. They know how many young birds were counted in the box at the last monitoring visit. And they view what remains there once the birds have left. But...how do they know how many have left on their journey toward the rainbow?

One of the basic reasons why monitoring and record keeping are so important to good bluebird trail management has to do with numbers—numbers of eggs, numbers of nestlings which hatch from those eggs, and the number of fledglings which have matured to the point where they are ready to leave the nest and strike out on their own. Only periodic/regular monitoring visits can establish these numbers. Only a written record will permit the accurate recall of these numbers on subsequent monitoring visits. Without these two procedures, no reliable fledging statistics or projections can be made.

Even when fully armed with this numerical information, the trail manager must often rely on purely “*circumstantial evidence*” to help him establish the number of young birds which have left the nest box.

A few clues can be of considerable help in solving the case:

CLUE #1 An extraordinarily “dirty” box containing a matted/flattened nest which is unusually damp and sometimes laced with dirt and fecal matter is a good sign that all of the young birds have fledged. “Whitewash” outside the box below the entrance hole indicates that the parents

made many feeding visits to the nest until just before the parental food-coaxing calls began outside the box;

CLUE #2 Add to Clue #1, the presence of “whitewash” high up on the interior box walls and inside below the entrance hole, berry stains on the walls and seeds in the bottom of the box together with the carcasses of a variety of dead insects. When summed up, all of these clues make a very strong case for the fledging of all of the birds counted at the last monitoring visit;

CLUE #3 The presence of ants as the “cleanup squad” indicates that lots of food was fed to lots of young birds who left lots of dung in the box during their last days of residence;

CLUE #4 Perhaps the *best indicator* of nesting success and the number of young fledging from the nestbox is the after-fledging residual amount of a substance called *chitin* (kite'n). Bird feathers are formed in sheaths composed of this flexible, scaly material. As the nestlings grow, the feathers begin to break out of the exposed, dried sheaths causing them to disintegrate into dandruff-like particles. The chitin sifts downward into and through the nesting material with much of it coming to rest on the floor of the box. The volume of this residue, in greater or lesser degree, is helpful in making a determination as to the total success of the nesting—the more birds reaching the fledgling stage, the greater the accumulation of chitin in and under the nest material. In a dry nestbox, the light fluff merely blows away as the nestbox is cleaned in preparation for new nesting activity;

CLUE #5 Many times, the trail manager is startled to see unhatched eggs, broken egg shells, and decomposed or desiccated nestlings in the well worn, vacated nest after the viable birds have left. Even the most

observant bluebirder sometimes overlooks this situation during the monitoring of an active nestbox. This does not affect the data as to numbers of birds fledged. It is, however, a common practice to adjust the trail record book so as to accurately reflect increases in the numbers of eggs laid and/or hatchlings produced for that nesting;

CLUE #6 If good records are kept, the trail monitor knows exactly how many healthy birds might be expected to fledge from a particular box and about when that event might occur. Obviously, dead birds in the nest alter the statistics not only for that box but for the entire trail as well;

CLUE #7 If there is no physical evidence of predation or box intrusion, it can be assumed that the pre-fledgling birds last monitored have successfully exited the box.

Early on, the experienced trail manager gets a composite picture of these clues as he monitors each box. Sometimes the clues are obvious, making it relatively easy to determine “what went wrong” in a particular nesting situation. At other times, the mysteries and unknowns are greater. It is then that consultation with a seasoned trail veteran is desirable. And, once in a while, even the most educated of guesses seem inadequate to explain the enigmas of the trail.

But, of course, the real joy is looking on the sunny side to determine how many young, healthy birds are out of that box because of the commitment made months ago by an effective trail manager—and if a misty rain shower comes along with that cheerful sunshine—so much better the prospect for—a rainbow.


Special thanks to Harold Arlen for the music, Judy Garland for singing it, and, especially, E.Y. “Yip” Harburg for the words.


From Ohio Bluebird Society's
Bluebird News, Vol 13, no.7


Don Yoder's


NOTES FROM THE FIELD

During our last visit in these pages we brought you some of the comments that fellow birders included on their Annual Reports. We think this is a way to share experiences and to compare notes. We invite—urge—you to include your own comments which we can pass along to fellow birders, up and down the state, verifying that all of our members participate in similar problems and successes.


 **Howard Hansen**, in El Dorado at 2480 feet, noted that the first clutch in one of his four boxes died, but a second attempt produced 4 birds in 90° temperatures. He speculates that heat may have caused the earlier loss. (*Attaching a board for shade on the southwest side of the fence post may turn the trick and produce a cooler box —Ed.*)


 From Contra Costa comes **Warren MacMath's** summary. He reports that inspection of a 10-yr old box began in mid-February. Rather than Violet-green Swallows he'd had in the past, it had bluebirds and by the end of March youngsters had fledged and the family disappeared. They reappeared in mid-May—adults and 4 juveniles—reinspected the box, raised a second brood of 3 and left suddenly on 3 July.


 **Ann Haiman**, Contra Costa, in company with students of the Homeschool Group, report seeing fewer than the usual 12-30 Violet-green Swallows seen on previous monitoring trips. Several Western Bluebirds fledged, however.


 Good times are especially pleasant when things just seem to go right. **Billie Arthur**, Orange, new in the Program, reports they had no


problems but a Bewick's Wren fledged 5 in a bluebird box. She's right: That's not a problem.


 Some birds are cooperative. **Frances Mills**, Lake, notes that sparrows and House Finches thoughtfully use baskets and flower pots instead of her nestboxes, but some other birds occupy unreachable areas where they can't even be counted.

 **Jeannette Knight**, Lake Coordinator, finds the climate in her locale to often be wet and cold when bluebirds make first nesting attempts. Her boxes are hung on pipe fence posts and predators are generally not a problem.


 A neighbor's cats are no help for **Cynthia Vollmar**, Placer, unless they help chase off the sparrows, but they may also have caused desertion by swallows from one box.

 From out in San Bernardino's Bearpaw Sanctuary, **Cin Greyraven** has 29 boxes installed in batches over the past 3 years. The observed usage trend is upward as the age of boxes increases. Still, instances of abandonment of eggs and loss of chicks, possibly brought on by invasion of ants, are still occurring. Cin plans to change territory of those boxes and apply Tanglefoot® to mounting posts.


 **David W. Smoot**, El Dorado, wants to branch out to other cavity nesters and requested box patterns for Wood Ducks, and for owls of several varieties.

 We have a report from **Bill Jenkins**, Sacramento County. He credits a single box plan at a dis-

play booth managed by **Lesa Chan**, Placer CoCo, at the 1995 Roseville Ecology Fair, with inspiring him to start a bluebird trail. Bill recycled some redwood fencing material and hung 17 boxes. His results were encouraging. Since that time he has built boxes and provided kits for several school classes, inspiring students with the beauty of bluebirds and showing how easily their needs can be met. Boxes sold at fund raisers and other public events have now spread to at least four counties and three other states. Thanks, Bill, for your interest and dedication in these worthy projects

 It is pretty easy to spread the word about your interest in bluebirding. **Howard Rathlesberger**, San Mateo CoCo, made a contact at a local golf course and found a hot button concerning box placement on the course. Seems the course management operates 5 courses and Howard's contact is to be in charge of environmental programs on all 5 courses foreseeing 20 boxes per course by fall.

With such growing interest, it should often be possible to have staff members cooperate in the monitoring schedule, helping with the 'work' and sharing the pleasure of a successful activity.

 One of two boxes placed by **Don Johnson**, Lake, in '96 fledged 10 youngsters. Hoping to increase the trend in '97 he added two more boxes—but still got only 10 from one box. He plans another attempt to raise the average by placing additional boxes for '98. At least he has space available for tenants.

A box in a given location for a number of years may not be occupied every season. Having been
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More NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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'found' once, however, we hope the same tenants might return regularly each year.

Jack Wilburn's trail of 118 boxes in El Dorado experienced numerous visits by raccoons and snakes which markedly decreased the success of his available cavities. He's planning more effective deterrents and protected posts for the '98 season.

In a Christmas Greeting to the Editor, **Henry Ratz**, Amador, reported observations on several local varieties of feathered friends. He found a solution to the persistent House Wren problem by hanging an empty gourd in a central location. "They will stuff that forever if you pull out a few twigs every morning, thus forgetting to annoy you at the other nest sites."

The cooperation between CBRP members and US Forest Service staff is so close in some locations it becomes unclear which team they represent. **Susan Yasuda**, at Placerville Ranger Station, El Dorado, monitors 3 trails; on one, she includes a cavity in a power pole. Forest critters including wasps, ants and earwigs also find cavities to be to their liking and need to be dealt with just as they do at lower elevations.

From Orange County, **Ernie Schimmelman** stacked a lot of figures in a small report space. With 20 boxes and 21 attempts he found 98 eggs laid, 82 (84%) hatched of which 66 (80%) fledged. Of his 20 boxes, 16 (80%) were active; there were 21 nests averaging 5 eggs per nest.

Ernie summarized his figures in less space than it has taken to tell about them.

In a traffic turning circle in Greenwood, **Martin F. Zdolsek**, El Dorado, fledged 4 and had 4 abandoned from the 2nd nesting attempt. Well, 50% is better than none.

Richard Colby, Amador, shared one bluebird and a titmouse with a neighbor but still reported 10 bluebirds fledged.

Wooly worms, spiders and earwigs met their fate when evicted from boxes put up by **Bobbie Jarrett**, El Dorado. She had no nesting attempts in her first year with nestboxes. A prospective head-of-the-household wasn't able to attract a mate.

In San Bernardino, **Glenn Chappell**, educator, is planning better monitoring arrangements for the coming year but found enough bluebirds fledged on college campuses to encourage repeats of the examinations in '98.

Banding for future identification moved a step ahead when **Richard & Peggy Percy**, El Dorado, had eight bluebirds tagged by **Dave DeLongchamp**. They plan extra close attention looking for bands during the new year's activity.

Joan Jernegan, Placer, was a bit put out when an impudent Bewick's Wren occupied a nestbox that was home to bluebirds for 5 years. And 8 of the rascals hatched—and grew—and died in the box before they fledged.

A change of luck for **Jean Dorall**, Amador, who has long had bluebirds in or traversing her area. This year, her first to have a nestbox trail, she

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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.

and more NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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didn't see any birds. Blues! please take note and show some respect by hanging around.



In spite of neighborhood cats and sparrows, 2 nestboxes double-clutched for **Cynthia Vollmar**, Placer; a box of 5 swallows were all found dead.



After she provided steel pipe box supports, predator problems have been reduced to a minimum for **Jeannette Knight**, Lake CoCo, but early nesters are often in difficulty due to cold or wet weather, or both.



Frances Mills, also Lake, reports nesting activity by several 'other' varieties but not in nestboxes she has installed. Such activities seem to go on at heights and in places that can't be monitored.



Bluebirds seem to recognize territorial intrusion from at least 100 yards. **Bob Franz**, Orange, has two boxes in a park, one of which was occupied. The tenants of the occupied box recognize him as soon as he parks near the vacant box to assemble his lifter pole (a la Purvis). Their agitation continues until he has examined and replaced both boxes and makes his departure. He wonders whether it's his hat, or the pole by which they identify him as 'the bluebird guy'?



Uninvited guests used a box for storage—not nesting—for **Deborah Conway**, Butte CoCo. On a monitoring visit she found acorns rolling out of the entrance hole.

At least that's better than protruding grass that's sometimes found.



In a wonderful narrative report **Kevin Putman**, Sutter CoCo, consid-

ers only 17 of his 79 boxes as a trail, the remainder being scattered in two counties.

He deals with heat in boxes by hanging them on the east side of poles & trees, shaded from hottest afternoon sun.

After a Scrub Jay invaded a NABS box he found but 1 of 6 hatchlings still present. His theory: the youngsters, believing they were about to be fed, extended their necks, enabling the jay to reach them through the 1-9/16" hole. (The nest was 4" high, but we don't know whether this was a first or second brood for which the old first nest had been left in place. There are some deeper box designs which Kevin believes may have to be adopted as standard facilities.)

He also monitors 66 Wood Duck boxes for CA Waterfowl Association.



From Santa Clara County **Doug & Ardeth Greenquist** found only an uncompleted swallow nest in one of their 6 boxes placed in a County park. No signs of predation or parasites were noted. Doug says the boxes were placed just after mid-April which makes them always available, but possibly not early enough for early arriving blues. (*Many species start in February and March including swallows* —Ed.)



Philip & Beverly Jones reported on one very busy and well occupied bluebird nestbox: On the first attempt 5 Western Bluebirds hatched and were within 2 days of fledging when they were ingested by one well-fed gopher snake. He greeted the monitors making their 'last' visit. They removed the snake, leaving the nest intact; it was occupied in 3 hours by Tree Swallows who fledged

4. Reassuming possession of their territory, Western Bluebirds again built and fledged 6. (*You need a program to separate all of the players.* —Ed).



Oscar Enstrom, County Coordinator Contra Costa (*that's CoCo CoCo*) covers four trails. Along one with 26 boxes at a public reservoir, there was evidence of predation, including a 2-legged varmint, all of which reduced potential bluebird success. Second and third trails of 6 and 14 newly installed units had no attempts whatever. An older trail of 10 boxes exhibited more successful second nestings where old nests were left in place.



An outside agency played a big part in fledging 5 bluebirds for **Catherine Heater**, Sonoma. Abandoned nests following rainy and cold weather nearly ruined the entire season. However, adults disappeared in fair weather from one nest, leaving 5 youngsters on their own but helpless. Catherine took the 5 to **Santa Rosa Bird Rescue Center** where the early prospect was that all 5 would fledge. (*A pay-off for attentive monitoring.* — Ed).



Up in Amador, **Joyce Theios** has 5 boxes of which 2 were occupied by successful flycatcher families, repeating last year's usage. But again, four other boxes haven't been found by occupants.



Reporting from the Lassen NF-Almanor Ranger Station, **Michael Magnuson** provided 15 nestboxes but was able to attract only Mountain Chickadees to 2, where a total of 13 added to the population.



Experience in her first year with
continued on page 8

Nestboxes & natural cavities compared

Scientists¹ from U Nevada-Reno and the US Forest Service monitored from 44 to 92 nestboxes on the San Joaquin Experimental Range in Madera County from 1989 to 1994 and compared them with natural cavity use in trees in the area. The area is a typical foothill oak-pine woodland and savanna.

As reported in *The Auk* 114(4): 646-656, 1997, four species—Ash-throated Flycatcher, Plain (Oak) Titmouse, House Wren, and Western Bluebird used nestboxes in sufficient numbers to compare with natural nest sites.

In nestboxes, Bluebirds gained the most advantage: earlier egg-laying, higher nesting success, lower predation, fledged slightly more young. They did not have larger clutches or hatch more eggs.

Oak Titmice had a little less predation, hatched more eggs, and fledged more young. They did not have higher success or start nesting earlier than in natural cavities.

House Wrens laid larger clutches, hatched more eggs, fledged more young, and had a slightly higher success and lower predation rate.

Ash-throated Flycatchers apparently had no benefits from nesting in boxes versus cavities.

In all of these species, no significant relationships were found between clutch size and bottom area or volume of cavities.

In the summary, the authors state, "Although the addition of nestboxes to a habitat may precipitate changes in the relative abundances of bird species (both cavity nesters and open nesters), we believe that nest-

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National Forest monitors needed

County Coordinators and members: don't forget our Memorandum of Understanding with the US Forest Service. If you are in, near, or have access to National Forest land you will be welcomed in your quest for nestbox sites by staff members—rangers, biologists, et al. They are fully apprised and supportive of our Program, which extends their efforts for resource protection and management. They are ready to work with you in establishing trails and exchanging records and information about your results. Available land is almost unlimited—reliable monitors are needed.

A corollary of this opportunity is the need for nestboxes in timberland decimated by recent forest fires. Tremendous loss of habitat has resulted in a shortage of natural cavities. Nestboxes placed along the edges of open areas should be well and gratefully received. We have been told that "the birds are there" but no cavities are available.

RECORD KEEPING

If you monitor a trail of one box or hundreds you know that data you record can be very valuable and may be referred to in the future. The ease of recording and accessing data later may influence just how well you write the original records. Some monitors no doubt use their computers to facilitate this process. And here we'd like some help. If you use or know of a software program for either a Mac or PC that enables you to record activity as information changes, and then produce totals by species for your Annual Report, we would appreciate learning its name.

We think our CBRP Form 4 is a close approach to an electronic method of determining summaries but pencil pushing can be slow. There must be other ways—Let us pass along the means you employ to keep your records timely and accessible.

Cornell's Nestbox Network (CNBN) provides software for recording nestbox characteristics and forms documenting nestbuilding, egg laying,

nestlings hatched, and nestlings fledged. There is a place for comments after each visit to the box. Results can be totaled at anytime.

Cornell requests \$15 to join the network and provides an attractive notebook.

The software can be downloaded from the internet or they will send you the software for Mac or PC on request.

The initial data entries for each nestbox are time consuming but the subsequent data entry is straightforward.

You can contact Cornell at:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology
159 Sapsucker Woods Rd
Ithaca, NY 14850-1999
www.ornith.cornell.edu/CS/CNBN

You may have a simpler program. Let us know.

Nestbox

You were a soft blue shadow
but I found the angle of your wings,
lifted you almost weightless out
and held you up to the light of late
June morning—light of pigeon hawk
and redtail, of snake-brittle grass
—so I could count your eggs. Five
blue ovals, perfect ponds reflecting
summer sky, and warm with brooding.

You didn't flutter as I set you back
on your nest. But something pulsed
against my palm. I set the lid
back in place and opened up my hand.
As if I could hold blue sky.

—Taylor Graham

First appeared in *The Poet's Guild*

Sparrows meet trouble in Joplin, Missouri

Reprinted from *Bluebirds Forever*, Winter '97, Project Bluebird, Joplin, MO. *Harold Cox, editor.*

We met a lady this fall, who wanted a bluebird box in her backyard. At first, we thought we would not be able to help her. She lived far enough into the interior of Joplin that this would disqualify most people from having a box. As we have said before, sparrows and starlings *rule* the cities as far as cavity nesting birds are concerned. But this lady lived adjacent to a wooded area and has frequently seen bluebirds. We are always willing to place a box in town if there have been regular bluebird sightings.

She told us how she had ridded herself of sparrows, so this was a plus too. A few years back, she bought a sparrow trap and trapped close to 300 sparrows over several years. When we asked what she did with all those sparrows she explained that she had been raised on a farm and she just "wrung their little necks." We know that this method of sparrow control will offend some of our readers, so we will have this lady remain anonymous. Good luck with your nesting box! We would love to have bluebirds back in Joplin.

and even more NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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nestboxes enabled **Enid Reeves**, El Dorado, to put up with problems encountered this (her 2nd) year. A dead bluebird in a box greeted her in March. A nest built on top of an unsuccessful nest actually fledged 3 of 4 hatchlings. Jury duty and a sprained ankle did not promote good monitoring but left open a chance for a better year in '98.



Also in El Dorado, **Jim Fletcher's** 8 boxes fledged 30 Western Bluebirds and gave us the 2nd report of Scrub Jays invading nestboxes to snatch out nestlings. Incidentally, the entrance hole to this box had become enlarged, making for easier extraction of the residents and emphasizing the importance of regular monitoring to make repairs as needed. And a new variety of harassment was also included in Jim's report: a Nuttall's Woodpecker removed a completed bluebird nest and took the space for roosting at night. The bluebirds promptly moved to another box and successfully nested. The Nuttall's gave up the space around June 1 but returned again when October rains started.



Chuck Welch, CoCo, Modoc, says "it was a miserable year for blue-

birds." He says that after fighting tooth and nail over possession of boxes they all left the area for good. A Mountain Bluebird fledged 4 on a second attempt. Chuck plans to get his son involved in the monitoring next year and to sign him up in NABS.



From Kern County, **Keith Axelson** sends a fascinating 4-page typed history of the nesting activity at his 2 boxes: he recounts how a pair of bluebirds build a nest, the female laying a clutch, and the pair maintaining control of the second box while occupying the first. This is the kind of observation that makes monitoring fun—albeit it is a serious business after you have intervened into the welfare of the bluebird.



This account from **Becky Masters**, Amador, may be too violent for young readers. She watched a constant attack on an adult bluebird pair by 6-8 Tree Swallows at a time. Following the disappearance of the female bluebird, the male took on the feeding of five youngsters while also

defending the nestbox. He refused offered grub worms and was able to find enough insects to supply the need. A female swallow entered the box but was summarily pulled out by the head by the male blue; he carried her some 10 feet before dropping her.

Upon successfully raising the 5 to fledging stage, the male landed on the ground about 5 feet from Becky, looking her over before flying off to try to round up the flock into one tree.



It is not clear whether a Red-tailed Hawk pair that fledged 2 in the vicinity of a nestbox with 6 swallow eggs led to the latter's abandon-

continued on page 14

HERE'S FORM 1

You should already have started monitoring your boxes. Oak Titmice are already laying eggs. Western Blues are nesting. Swallows are fighting for the boxes.

CBRP Form 1 helps you keep accurate records including the estimated hatching date. Use a separate form for each box.

In the fall, we'll send you an Annual Report Form to summarize your data.

COPY THIS FORM FOR EACH OF YOUR BOXES

Hatch Graham's 32-page Monitoring Guide is still available, postpaid, for a \$3 donation. Write him at the address on page 2.

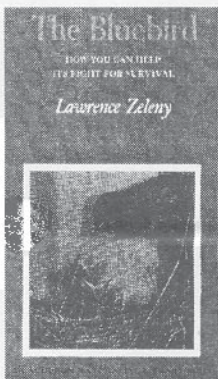
Bluebird Books Galore!

by Steve Eno

Are there any other birds that have had as many books written about them as the Bluebird? I doubt if even the popular backyard birds such as the Cardinal and Chickadee or the popular Purple Martins and Hummingbirds have as much written about them. This is just one indication of how special the Bluebird is and we should consider ourselves fortunate to be among those who know first hand just how special the Bluebird is.

For those of you who want to read all there is out there on bluebirds (and more), here is a list of all the books I've come across that deal specifically with bluebirds. This list includes books that I've labeled "educational" as well as those that are the stories of individuals who have dealt with bluebirds on a more up-close and personal level. If you want to order one of these books, I've tried to provide you with all the information you should need.

I'm sure this isn't a complete list of all the books on bluebirds out there, so if you are aware of any other "bluebird" books, please let me know!



The Bluebird - How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival;

by Lawrence Zeleny; published by Indiana University Press; 81976; 170 pages; available through NABS, Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530; \$9.95 + \$3.00 shipping & handling (S/H).

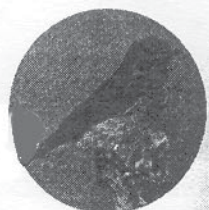
Bluebird Rescue;

by Joan Rattner Heilman; published by Camden House Publishing; 81992; 48 pages; \$16.95. (Not Available)

Bluebird Trails

• A GUIDE TO SUCCESS •

Dorene H. Scriven



Bluebird Trails - A Guide to Success;

(updated material previously under the title "Bluebirds in the Upper Midwest - A Guide to Successful Trail Management"); by Dorene H. Scriven; 81993; 220 pages; available at many book stores and bird stores and through Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program, c/o Marlys Hjort, 9571 - 270th Street North, Chisago City, MN 55013; \$12.00, postage included.

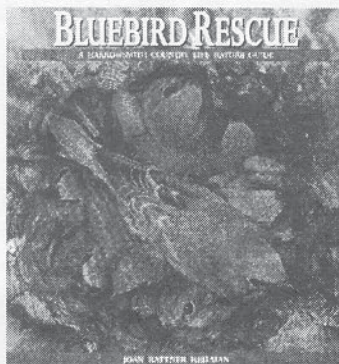
The Complete Guide to Attracting Bluebirds



Educational:

The Bluebird Book - The Complete Guide to Attracting Bluebirds;

by Donald & Lillian Stokes; published by Little, Brown & Company; 81991; 96 pages; available at most book stores and bird stores and through the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530; \$9.95 + \$3.00 shipping & handling (S/H)



Bluebirds - The How-To Book;

by Fred Comstock; 81993; 68 pages; available through: Frederick W. Comstock, 168 Main Street North, Bethlehem, CT 06751; \$7.95 + \$2.00 S/H for 1st copy of \$5.00 for each subsequent copy.

BLUEBIRDS

THE HOW TO BOOK

by Fred Comstock



Attract Them. Help Their Survival

Bringing Back the Bluebirds - Even on Your Hand!;

by Andrew Troyer; published by Carlisle Printing; 81995; 32 pages; available through Birds Paradise, 20835 Morris Rd., Conneautville, PA 16406; \$6.95 + \$1.50 S/H.



Enjoying Bluebirds More;

by Julie Zickefoose; published by Bird Watcher's Digest Press; 81993; 32 pages; available at bird stores and through BAN(see sale items in this newsletter); \$3.50.

Mountain Bluebird Management;

by Bryan R. Shantz; published by Deer Ridge Consulting Ltd. of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada and NABS; 81986; 32 pages; available through Ellis Bird Farm Ltd., Box 5090, Lacombe, AB T4L 1W7 - Canada; \$4.00 + \$2.00 S/H.



Bluebirds; by Steve Grooms & Dick Peterson; published by NorthWord Press; 81991; 158 pages; available through book stores; \$16.95.

Bluebirds and Their Survival;

by Wayne H. Davis and Philippe Roca; published by University Press of Kentucky; 81995; 154 pages; available through NABS; \$15.95 + \$3.00 S/H.



Wayne H. Davis
Philippe Roca



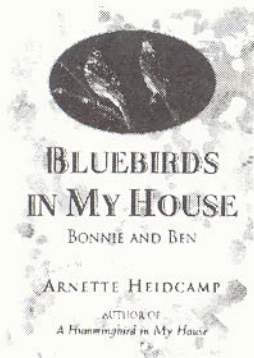
Andrew M. Troyer

Educational/Personal:

Bluebirds Forever; by Connie Toops; published by Voyager Press; 81994; 128 pages; paperback available through NABS, Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530; \$22.95 + \$3.00 S/H; hardback available through BAN \$30.00 + \$2.50 S/H.



Bluebirds in My House - Bonnie and Ben; (also referenced under "My Bluebird Family" by Arnette Heidcamp; published by Crown Publishers; 81997; 150 pages; can be ordered through book stores \$18.00.



Bluebirds - Their Daily Lives and How to Attract and Raise Bluebirds; by Tina & Curtis Dew and R.B. (Reber) Layton; published by Nature Books Publishers; 81986; 212 pages; available through NABS, Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530; \$9.95 + \$3.00 S/H.



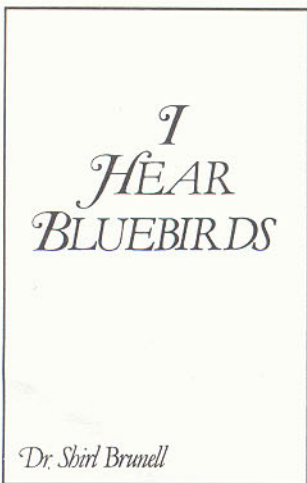
Tina and Curtis Dew and R.B. (Reber) Layton

Living with Mountain Bluebirds; by Helen M. Johnson; published by Carlisle Printing; 81997; 131 pages; available through Helen M. Johnson, 6011 East Vernon Ave., Scottsdale, AZ 85257; \$11.95.



Personal Story:

I Hear Bluebirds; by Dr. Shirl Brunell; published by Vantage Press; 81988; 115 pages; can be ordered through book stores; \$7.95.

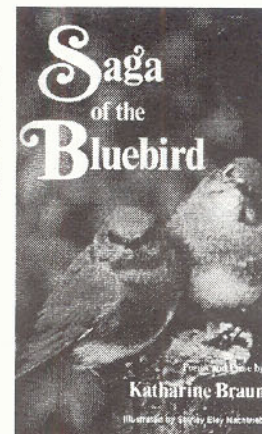
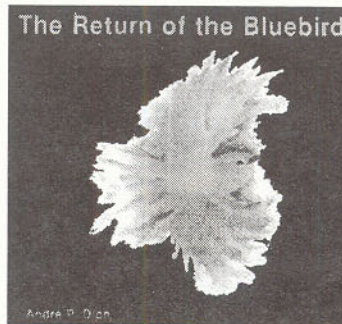


Dr. Shirl Brunell

Poetry:

Saga of the Bluebird; by Katherine Braun; published in 1982 by Exposition Press (Not Available).

The Return of the Bluebird; by Andre P. Dion; published by Auto-Correct-Art, Inc. of Quebec; 81984; 136 pages; available through NABS, Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530; special promotion price \$1.00 + \$3.00 S/H.



Children's Books:

A Bluebird's First Summer; written & illustrated by Helena Craven; 14 pages; 81996; available through BAN or MBRP, c/o Marlys Hjort, 9571 - 270th Street North, Chisago City, MN 55013; \$6.00. postage included.



Bluebirds Seven Coloring Book; by R. Bruce Horsfall; a publication of the Audubon Society of Portland, OR; 81983; 32 pages; write to Audubon Society of Portland, 5151 N.W. Cornell Rd., Portland, OR 97232 as to availability; \$2.95.

BLUEBIRDS SEVEN Coloring Book



R. Bruce Horsfall
An Audubon Society book

California Trail: great idea or pipedream?

The North American Bluebird Society suggests an International Nestbox Trail to cross the US and Canada. Presumably it would include a segment from British Columbia down through Washington, Oregon and California. We'll soon know their further plans.

In an early newsletter, Program Director **Don Yoder** suggested that birders in the California Program are well situated to participate in such a trail. Considering the physical aspects of the State the trail could extend at least 1000 miles. This would be a healthy segment of the total and more extensive than in any other State (although the Canadian provinces would still hold the record). Yoder wants the California Program to play a large part in furthering this International effort.

We welcome your thoughts on this proposal. Where would it go through California? How could existing trails tie in? Are there any breaks in the continuity of bluebird populations? Could we bridge the gaps? Where can we recruit dedicated monitors? Would this just be a bunch of untended lunchboxes for predators or an inspirational demonstration of effective conservation? What do you think? Let us hear from you.

Bluebirds Across Nebraska provide book references for CBRP

When **Steve Eno's** article *Bluebird Books Galore* appeared in the Fall 1997 issue of BAN's newsletter, **BLUEBIRDS FLY!** editors were green with envy.

Program Director **Don Yoder** wrote BAN's editor, **Anne DeVries**, and she graciously supplied us with the copy. (See pages 11 & 12)

Bluebirds Across Nebraska is a sister affiliate with CBRP in NABS.

BLUEBIRD OCCUPANCY INCREASES WHEN BOXES ARE PAIRED

In July **Ron Bittner**, of Abernathy, Saskatchewan, Canada, sent us a copy of his and **Bill Anaka's** bluebird data from 1984 through 1996.

From 1984 through 1987 Bittner's 12 boxes were not paired. He had 8% bluebird occupancy in 1985 and in 1987, none in 1984 and 1986. In 1988 he began pairing all boxes as well as increasing numbers of sites, up to 36 pairs of boxes (72 total) in 1996. The percentage of bluebird occupancy has varied from 42% to 71% each year since he started pairing.

The Bill Anaka data was similar over the same 15-year span. The highest per cent bluebird occupancy of his 40 boxes was 10% before he started pairing; then increased to 22% occupancy when he paired 7 of his 41 boxes in 1988. From 1989 to 1996, he increased the number of boxes and all his boxes were paired (108 total). The bluebird occupancy ranged from 69% to 95%.

"The increase [in bluebird occupancy] was so significant that the occupancy rate went up even when measured using occupancy per box rather than occupancy per site."

Reprinted from Bluebird News, v.9 no.3. Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Dorene Scriven, editor.

Boxes & trees compared

from page 7

box programs are generally beneficial. We also believe that nestboxes may provide an opportunity, scarcely used in the past, to investigate questions of interspecific competition in bird communities."

*'Kathryn L. Purcell, U Nevada
Jared Verner, PSW Research Station
Lewis W Oring, U Nevada*

Our thanks to Cornell Lab of Ornithology for locating this article in response to our request for more information on Ash-throated Flycatchers. —Ed.

Purple Martins

In its byline, CBRP proclaims it is "for the encouragement and preservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West." We think our goal is made abundantly clear in that expression. Much of our written material focuses on bluebirds (for us, the Western and Mountain species) —their encouragement, production, protection and observation. Lest we lose track of other varieties of cavity nesters and their role in the total scheme of Nature's plan we need sometimes to say a word or two about other varieties that also nest in cavities—whether natural or man-made. Where they occur, there are large groups of devotees of Purple Martins who apply the same interest and zeal that we do to Bluebirds.

Attracting these birds with nest boxes much larger and more complicated than are required for bluebirds is a lifetime interest for many. From local clubs in metropolitan centers to individual fanciers these birds receive substantial housing assistance and facilities.

It is believed that a single martin can consume 2000 mosquitoes a day, greatly improving the human habitat. And they provide a twittering chorus of song as they perch shoulder to shoulder on sagging telephone lines or antenna elements.

We'd like to know if any of you in California enjoy the presence of nesting Purple Martins. Do you know of any colonies of these birds? Write to tell us about the size of the colony, where they can be found and their migratory movements.

The monthly *Nature Society News*, the voice of the Purple Martin, contains a wealth of news and information on these and other varieties of feathered friends. Write them at Purple Martin Junction, Griggsville, IL 62340; (217)833-2323.

Last of the NOTES FROM THE FIELD

from page 8

ment, but **Sharon May & Mary Lambert**, Amador, had double nestings of Bluebirds in one box, and swallows twice each in two other boxes.



Katie Bolger, El Dorado, maintains 5 nestboxes of which 2 were occupied again this year—just as last year despite accommodations being offered for more. At least they are there when needed.

The interesting accounts of experiences on the monitoring trail as reported by their caretakers serve to emphasize (1) the importance of monitoring nestboxes on a regular schedule, and (2) events in the lives of cavity nesters which would never be enjoyed but are there for the seeing if we but stay alert to what is taking place around us. Time available for monitoring is oftentimes too limited to permit such observations—which also proves that it pays to do a good job on fewer boxes than to strive for extended trails with more boxes than can be correctly serviced.

It is a pleasure to review comments you have included along with your annual reports of nestbox activity. We'd like to see more of those narrations which always reflect the particular conditions in your area. It is through such observations that we are able to pass along highlights that we think are of interest to fellow birders and which meld your efforts into the single California Program. Include your comments whenever possible; mid-season items are also always appreciated and we'll try to include them in the next Newsletter.

Happy bluebirding this season!

Uncle Don

BirdSource—an Audubon & Cornell Lab effort

The **National Audubon Society** and the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** are collaborating to create **BirdSource**—an interactive web site in which birders and ornithologists will be able to share information on bird sightings, movements, populations, online data submission and retrieval from Project FeederWatch and the Christmas Bird Count, among others. Creating a web site capable of processing both historic data and continuously updated reports stretches the capabilities of present applications: still, programmers at the Cornell Theory Center who designed the system had **BirdSource** operational in late February for the first Nationwide backyard bird count.

“When it's completed, you'll be able to go to **BirdSource** and ask, ‘Where were Dark-eyed Juncos in December 1934?’ and instantly see a map displaying reported sightings of that species,” says Lab director **John Fitzpatrick**. “Eventually, you'll be able to ‘watch’ as millions of migrating hawks from North America funnel through Central America on their way to South America. You'll also be able to come home from a day of birding, log on to **BirdSource**, and share your checklist with thousands of other amateur birders and professional ornithologists who need your data.” Ultimately, **BirdSource** will also provide detailed pictures, recorded songs and calls, and information for hundreds of bird species to help birders identify and learn more about the birds they see.

According to **John Flicker**, president of Audubon, **BirdSource** will provide the most current and comprehensive data available on the distribution, migratory pathways, and population trends of North American birds. “This partnership is a per-

fect marriage of Cornell's high-tech computer capabilities, the Lab of Ornithology's citizen-science team, and Audubon's thousands of volunteer birders collecting data at the grassroots level,” he says. In addition to archiving data from Project FeederWatch and other Lab citizen-science projects, **BirdSource** will include data from long-running national projects, including all the Christmas Bird Counts since 1900. These counts, managed by the National Audubon Society, collect data from more than 45,000 volunteer participants each year.

BirdSource will also offer an array of new opportunities for citizen-science participation in birding. “An estimated 30 to 60 million people in North America watch and feed birds,” says Fitzpatrick. “At this moment, thousands of people are jotting down their observations. If they would ‘jot’ their notes into **BirdSource**, we'd have their data recorded in an immediately usable form. We will eventually have up-to-the-minute accounts on where birds are at any given moment—and so will anyone who opens **BirdSource**.”

Both **Flicker** and **Fitzpatrick** emphasize how valuable this data—collected from thousands of birders from across North America—will be to bird conservation. “If we could have had something like **BirdSource** in the 1890s, when there were still Passenger Pigeons and Carolina Parakeets, perhaps we could have seen their declines early enough to save those birds. Now, we'll be able to get information about diminishing species in a form that we can understand and use while there is still time to help them.”

You can check into **BirdSource** on the World Wide Web at:

<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>

These coordinators are ready to help you—

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ajpa@pacbell.net

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Sonoma County

(see Napa & Sonoma)

Sutter County

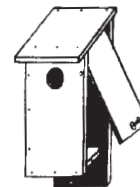
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Bluebird health food?

In going over some of my notes from last year, I was reminded about a strange thing (to me) that I observed at Woodcreek Golf Course. I was stopped in my little green golf cart, waiting for the golfers to finish, when I noticed this male bluebird returning repeatedly to the base of a rotted out blue oak tree. To make this story short(er)...he was capturing honey bees that had a hive in this tree and taking them (for feeding) to the nest that I was waiting to check! These young had fledged by the following week, so I never had the opportunity to see him do this again. And, 12 (6 + 6) chicks were fledged from this nest-box in 1997. Honeybees as health food.... Have you ever heard of such a thing?

Dee Warenycia, Placer Co.

Don't screw 'em — Bolt 'em

Box builders and trail managers are inventive folks. Last issue we showed plans for the Chance's Elevator Pole and suggested the ½" EMT pipe be attached to the box with deck screws.

Concern has been expressed that if the box is made of a softwood like redwood, the screws could tear out in a serious windstorm. A more positive method of attachment would be two 2" x ¼" carriage bolts inserted from the inside through the box and pipe and then the shoulder drawn into the wood on the inside with a washer and nut outside.

The box would have to disintegrate to come off with this arrangement.

Keep your ideas coming.

POSSIBLE POSSUM PERIL!

June Schelhaus's husband, Marvin, who was born and grew up on their property in Placer Co., has a couple Wood Duck boxes along Dry Creek (which flows through their property). The boxes are mounted pretty high (due to the infamous flooding of the past two years), so he cleans them out once a year, but doesn't check them during nesting season. He climbed up to clean one out, stuck his hand in, and was bitten by an opossum.... They tried to catch the critter later, and it was gone, so now he is going through the whole rabies shot ordeal. A good lesson for all of us, I would say! His friends are sending him things like road-kill cookbooks, with the opossum page marked....

Has your subscription expired? Check your mailing label. The date will tell you. The first four digits are the year and the last two are the month. A donation of \$5 will extend your subscription for a year.

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