



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program's newsletter

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

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

CALIFORNIA TOPS 11 THOUSAND IN '98

Highest totals ever—in spite of El Niño

In spite of a bad start in early Spring, totals of cavity-nesters fledged in California increased if our annual reports are an accurate measure.

In '97, we reported a grand total of 8393 birds fledged. For 1998, our total is 11,326.

Statisticians can work with the numbers and may point out that more reports were received (359 vs 336), and more nestboxes were reported (4142 vs 3642, an increase of 500), but this will not completely explain an increase of 35% in total birds.

The number of Western Bluebirds was slightly down (see accompanying article in column 3), but almost all other species increased. See page 9, column 3.

Certain species totals are hardly indicative of populations, though. We only have one major monitor at higher elevations. **Barbara Moore**, who monitors an extensive trail (121 boxes) in Nevada Co. above 5000 feet, was unable to monitor in 1997 but was back in '98. While Barbara reports Mountain Chickadees were down in numbers in '98 based on her 15 years of monitoring, her 83 chickadee fledglings really upped the total. She also checked in with 147 Mountain Bluebirds which clearly makes her the "Queen of the Mountain Bluebirds"—in California, at least.

Little Orange County leads State as usual

The **Purvis Gang** has done it again! With only 18 monitors, Orange County produced 2384 fledglings of all species. Still leading the pack is **Dick Purvis** himself with 1075 fledglings (not counting his trails in Los Angeles and Riverside Counties). While all are worthy of mention, we must recognize **James D. Cox** with 239, **Bob Franz** with 178, **Jane & Woody Morf** with 145, **Tom Croom** with 107, **Cecilia Perez** at Tustin Ranch Golf Course with 105, and **Linda Violet** with 101. Orange County had 2077 bluebirds, 40% of the State total.

Other top producers

In addition to our Orange County high-rollers, others deserve special mention. **Kevin Putman's** boxes in Yuba & Sutter produced the most birds; however, 79 of his 181 are Wood Duck boxes and those prolific characters made up 1279 of his 1609 total. **Dick Purvis's** 3-county total was 1235. **Jan Wasserman** had 802. **Jim Guthrie**, Calaveras, had 636 from his 185 boxes. **Barbara Moore** fledged 329 mtn blues, swallows, chickadees, and nuthatches.

Other high totals included **Dieter Thiel**, Santa Clara, 241; **Dee Warencya**, Placer, 239; **Don Yoder**, Contra Costa, 233; **Warren Engstrom**, Contra Costa, 224; **Hatch & Judy Graham**, 208; **Red Pendleton**,

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WESTERN BLUES EXCEED 5000

TREE SWALLOWS SOAR

As in 1997, over 5000 Western Bluebirds were reported fledged in California by our monitors. The actual total is down about 3% (5227 vs 5398). We expected worse. The number of attempts was up—1728 being reported as compared with 1639 attempts in '97.

For each attempt in '97, 3.29 birds, on average, were fledged. In '98, this dropped to 3.02 fledged per attempt. Another way of looking at this is for every four attempts in '98, another egg was abandoned or a nestling succumbed. Still, even with El Niño, the bluebirds continued to produce. The totals for either year should not be a basis for rejoicing, however. Production of less than 4 fledglings per attempt is unlikely to produce enough young to maintain an adult population given all of the natural losses after fledging. Your help is still needed.

On the Tree Swallow front, it seems to be another story. Fledglings increased nearly fourfold—up from 554 in '97 to 2008 in '98!

True, we have a newly reporting monitor, "the Swallow Lady of Ventura," **Jan Wasserman**, who monitors 192 boxes on three trails and reported 789 swallows alone! But Jan's total does not fill up all of the gap. One must conclude that Tree Swallows are on the rise.

Are your nestboxes all ready for the new season?

by Don Yoder

Perhaps all too soon the '98 nesting season came to an end for you. Or, maybe you were ready for a break in your busy monitoring schedule. In either case we now need to think about this new year, already well upon us.

Last chance to clean out boxes and give each a shot of mild bleach solution and leave them to air dry with all ventilation open as it should be.

Look for loose screws in box opening panels. Any identifying signs, labels, lettering, or numbers may need renewing or replacing. Box suspension or attachment features may need tightening—or loosening, in the case of wires around trees.

Hooks over tree limbs may have come loose. Anything that is not 'right' about the way the box is built as it now stands may need correction.

You might want to repaint the **Attraction Spots** to improve the visibility of each box. The what? Attraction Spots are a device suggested by a Midwest birder friend who uses them consistently on each box, and adoption of which increased our own production 37% in the first year. Simply, they are round flat black spots, about 1-1/2" in diameter, painted on each

side of the box about hole-high. Seen from a distance, a bird may view the spot as a cavity and investigate further. (Oh, what a lovely cavity, Mom). After being attracted to the nestbox, they will quickly discern the real hole from the decoy.

Oh, no occupants last year? Maybe the location is not the best. We like to have nestboxes available—For Rent; hopefully, a favored bird will find and use it this coming season.

Perhaps you have a rule, like, "If not used for X years, move it to a better location." Or face it in a different direction. But remember: If it isn't there, no one can use it at all.

Getting boxes into good condition, and cleaned, is a big step up for the spring work along the trail. Perhaps you did all this at the end of last season. Nonetheless, it's still a good idea to look in again now to be sure no overwintering earwigs, spiders, wasps or motel users' 'garbage' has accumulated.

From there on, we can only hope for the arrival of delighted occupants who will help your Recovery effort. Sharpen your pencils right away, if not done, get your nestbox forms ready and look forward to the delights of gaping bills.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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

CBRP is nonprofit, 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.

NABS BLUEBIRD LIST IS ON THE INTERNET

An e-mail exchange network for persons interested in bluebirds has been established and is available for free subscription. This listserv, as such networks are called, is a cooperative venture of the North American Bluebird Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Messages sent to this network are distributed automatically to all net members. Subscribers receive and send messages as e-mail via their designated e-mail provider. Picture

the network as a mailing list of persons interested in bluebirds: If you put your name on the list you share mail with other members.

It is anticipated that the net will be a popular place for exchange of information about bluebirds. The immediacy of e-mail makes it possible to ask a question of net members or make a comment and receive answers or replies not more than minutes later, should another member

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California Bluebird Recovery Program

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Founded in 1978, the **North American Bluebird Society** (NABS) is a nonprofit organization determined to increase the populations of the three species of bluebirds on this continent. Inasmuch as the populations of these birds have diminished due to the maladroitness of human beings, as well as natural disasters, the society strives to explain the importance of preserving native cavity-nesters.

The society works within the bounds of effective conservation to study obstacles impeding bluebird recovery and to promote ideas and actions which might reduce their effect.

Membership is \$15. NABS's mailing address is PO Box 74, Darlington, WI 53530.

National Audubon Society



They are local chapters of the **National Audubon Society** (NAS) 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 bimonthly magazine as well as membership privileges in your local Audubon chapter.

Spotlight on our cavity-nesters

The Ash-throated Flycatcher is a Neotropical bird; that is, one that winters in the tropics. It seldom arrives here from Mexico and farther south until mid-May, so it often must wait till the bluebirds have fledged their first brood before taking over a nestbox.

If your boxes are paired for bluebirds and swallows, the flycatchers will often nest alongside either one without incident.

Flycatchers build the base of their nest from moss, then gather scat from coyote, raccoon, and fox as long as it contains lots of fur of little animals. This, they somehow process into a felt mat. Sometimes they will also bring in fur from a roadkilled mammal. Monitoring a nest constructed of dead skunk fur is an ordeal but the Ash-throats don't seem to mind the perfume.

Their eggs are a larger, longer oval than bluebird eggs, pinkish, and streaked, spotted or blotched with purple and brown. They usually have one clutch of 4 to 5 eggs and are synchronous; that is, like bluebirds, they start incubating when the whole clutch is complete. Their incubation period is a couple of days longer than bluebirds but they make up for it by fledging earlier. It's often risky to inspect an Ash-throat's nest after about 10 days. The nestlings fledge at about 15 days and premature fledging is as dangerous for them as for bluebirds.

The Ash-throated Flycatcher hen is a wary bird. Unlike Western Bluebirds, Oak Titmice, and the chickadees and nuthatches, she will usually dart out of the box with your approach. Should you surprise her on her nest, she will make a loud, rapid clacking of her bill and flush directly in your face (veering off at the last moment, of course.)

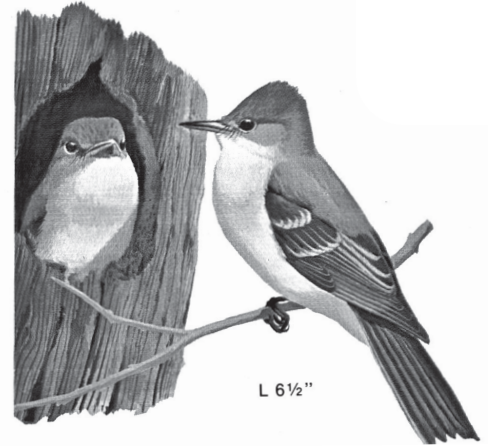
Larger than a bluebird, the Ash-throat is often confused with the Western Kingbird, but the Kingbird has a darker tail with white outer tailfeathers and does not nest in cavities. The diminutive Western Flycatcher (the size of the Oak Titmouse) with its white eye-ring is listed in Virgil E. Scott, et al, *Cavity-Nesting Birds of North American Forests*, (Agriculture Handbook No. 511, USGPO) but I know of no reports of a Western Flycatcher using a nestbox. They are more likely to nest under eaves or in moister riparian habitat than the Ash-throats who seem to prefer more dry open areas—at least in central California foothills.

According to the Breeding Bird Survey, the Ash-throated Flycatcher is holding its own, in spite of widespread concern over the plight of Neotropical migrants. In California, at least, these flycatchers have increased 41% in the past 29-year period. They are most abundant in the California Foothills, the Los Angeles Ranges, and Southern California Grasslands. They are seldom seen in the higher Sierra Nevada, the Central Valley, or the South Pacific Rainforest.

One of the diverse group of cavity-nesters that bless our State, the Ash-throated Flycatcher is a welcome addition to our nestbox trails. —HG

Ash-throated flycatcher

Myiarchus cinerascens



NOTES FROM THE FIELD



In **Doris Delbo's** Calistoga yard bluebirds nested since the '70s in a prune tree cavity that was near the ground and most convenient to stalking cats. For protection she plugged the cavity and provided a standard nestbox—which the blues refused. A second box attracted double blue clutches for 3 years. In '98 the (apparently) persistent blues scoped out the first box but were beaten out by both titmice and swallows. Doris may need some help to keep track of who's on first.



At around 3200 ft. elevation in Fresno County, **Tony & Donna Stieber** supply 3 birdbaths which attract bluebirds of all ages, in spite of '98 being the worst year of the last three for birds fledged. Heavy rain contributed to such an appraisal. And as we know, woodpeckers have a housing problem also; they enlarged the hole in 2 boxes before being outsmarted with hole overlays. Tony used weak bleach solution to disinfect boxes but wonders: does anyone have a better method? (Give us your recipe and we'll be glad to pass it along—or e-mail them at: dstieber@spiralcomm.net)



Bluebirds that have graced **Marion Kunkel's** yard in Amador seem to prefer standard boxes in lieu of any others—except for one time. Marion wonders if they went elsewhere because she didn't clean out the old nest fast enough? Oak Titmice like standard bluebird boxes also and nested for the first time since 1990. It takes a ladder to reach some boxes, even for cleaning after each clutch has flown.



He lives in what he terms a 'migrational belt' for bluebirds but, nonetheless, **Richard Kempton**, Ventura,

notes that nearly all 1998 nesting took place a month later than it does normally. And, maybe due to the cold weather, flycatchers relied strictly on fur for their nesting material.



In El Dorado, the beehive center of nestbox activity, **Charlotte Amundson's** 12 bluebird eggs in 2 starts fledged only 50% successfully after one male was found dead.



And **Claudette Wilson**, also in El Dorado, had a bare majority of fledglings in standard boxes but those from the Peterson box were close behind. Oak Titmice also favored the standard box.



In his first year monitoring boxes, **Peter Wetzel**, Orange, discovered the difficulty of accurately counting eggs and youngsters. Tree Swallows accounted for much of the problem, with their feather canopies concealing eggs and hiding hatchlings. But he did find a dead male bluebird on eggs; he removed the bird, found the eggs still warm, and all fledged. (Somebody Else watching over his cemetery trail?)



Still in Orange, **Lena Yee Hayashi**, found 9 starts and 38 eggs, managing to fledge 28 bluebirds. Five eggs were abandoned for unknown causes.



In Humboldt, **David & Susan Hagemann** have embarked on a project of building 100 nestboxes. They hope to provide them to neighbors who agree that some conservation projects are, in fact, worthwhile. David believes this may take some one-on-one contacts in order to complete the project. They have sent an introductory letter to a number of neighbors, offering boxes and

the chance of seeing the scarce blues in coming years. (Looks like a good effort in a difficult territory and atmosphere).



Further mention is in order of the great report received from **Linda Violet**, Orange, who appears to absorb and expand some of the good training provided by **Dick Purvis**. Monitoring 30 standard hanging boxes, her Form 2 reports 96 bluebirds fledged. She attached a scholarly resumé of things learned about operating a trail in urban territory. She covered such topics as locations for hanging boxes (avoiding traffic patterns of municipal entities who prune trees at the wrong times); the interpretation of cheeping sounds coming from boxes; use of boxes with larger floor area where larger clutches are known to have fledged; provision of mealworms for emergency feeding; precision feather placement in nests by the hens (for whom the feathers appear to have some significance); treatment of box exteriors; mites and how to get rid of them and how to keep from spreading such infestations. It is all fascinating reading and a worthy primer for monitoring.



Let's state here that **Hatch Graham**, our Editor and Publisher, has updated his great *Monitoring Guide—Monitoring Your Bluebird Trail in California* and has it ready for distribution now. If you don't have one, ask for a bonus copy with your renewal membership of \$10 or more. Otherwise, Hatch has them available for a \$3 donation which covers postage and handling (\$2 is tax-deductible). Write him at PO Box 39, Somerset, CA 95684-0039.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD



Don't you find something new and different each time you go around your trail? Here are two that we haven't seen before: **Shirley & Alvin Burr** in Del Norte report that foxes "tore into several bluebird houses after they hatched out." (Gosh, it's always another hazard). Bluebirds built at 1700 ft for 3 years, but have disappeared for 3 years, only to be replaced by tree swallows.



Loretta Goebel, Nevada Co., has boxes for wood ducks who didn't stay the season, but seven Mandarin ducks fledged. Who else can make that statement?



In San Bernardino, **Phyllis Lacey** had 9 bluebirds fledge from 2 clutches in the same box. She contends larger boxes encourage larger clutches in the first brood.



Longtime practitioner **Jan Wasserman**, Ventura, has had a tree swallow project on a continuing basis. She manages 3 trails and reports 789 tree swallows fledged. How many would there have been without El Niño? And just think of all the mosquitoes it takes to feed that flock!!!



We are delighted and grateful when we receive information from experienced people in any field relating to birding. And it can be real interesting. Case in point: **Peter Triem**, Ventura, a State-licensed rehabilitator, reports on Acorn Woodpeckers and their relationship with other species. He finds that these woodpeckers are feisty and aggressive—known to kill entire families of western bluebirds, ganging up on a flicker with a murderous attack. They are adept at pecking new holes in nestboxes, including the box bottoms, and

enlarging the entrance holes to their own requirements. Peter also asserts that Ash-throated Flycatchers and Western Screech Owls do not tolerate opening of boxes, especially in early stages of hatchling development—and, he says, Barn Owls even destroy their own eggs or cannibalize their young if disturbed before the oldest chicks are over 3 weeks of age. Flycatchers may simply desert and go elsewhere. His report captures attention. Have others observed this sort of behavior?



There is an ongoing survey of information originated by **Prescott Bluebird Recovery Program** (Oregon) about a problem with starlings gaining entrance to nestboxes with 1⁹/₁₆" holes. Please let us know if you have had any such experiences along your trail(s).



You have read the goal of our Program: *for the encouragement and conservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West*. In his article recommending diversity in nestbox construction for other species, published in our Vol 4 No. 2, **Garth Harwood**, Santa Clara CoCo has proposed new approaches to meeting the needs of other cavity nesters; i.e., species in addition to bluebirds. Concurrently NABS is reexamining its emphasis on bluebirds alone—recognizing that bluebirds are largely dependent on other species for production of cavities and, these species are also in need of support for their own existence. NABS's new periodical, *Bluebird*, likely will have one or more articles focusing on cavity-makers and the problems they are also experiencing due to loss of habitat. We will continue to deal with those needs in future editions of *BLUEBIRDS FLY!*



By the time you read these lines, it will be time to have nestboxes in place for the coming year. Experience shows that many 'tenants' are reluctant to use boxes the first year they're placed. Of course, we are cognizant of the birder who reported that a bluebird alighted on his cap while he was hanging a new box. **Lesla McDonald-Chan**, Placer CoCo, reports that only one nuthatch ventured into one of her 12 new boxes this year.



First-year birder **Linda Violett**, Orange Co., has found promising habitat for bluebirds in church yards. She sent flyers to a number of churches, explaining the needs of area wildlife, and received three responses permitting placement of nestboxes on church property in time for nesting season startup. Her 30 boxes fledged 101 birds, in severe competition with house sparrows. She is also providing flicker boxes, including a record of occupants and hole sizes modified by some tenants including squirrels.



Having boxes in good locations still did not get the desired results for **Oscar Enstrom**, Contra Costa CoCo, who needed additional monitoring help. His need demonstrates the opportunity for participation by willing helpers who can devote a few hours each week to record progress along various trails. We're anxious to know of your availability, hopefully to be matched with needs of nearby monitors.



Ray Di Basilio, El Dorado Co., enjoyed the 5 new boxes he put up in 1998. He had 3 Western Bluebird starts including 5 fledged (1 abandoned, 1 wren-pecked). While **Hatch**

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A LOOK BACK

Don Yoder, Program Director
California Bluebird Recovery Program

This issue of our newsletter *BLUE-BIRDS FLY!* is the fourth issue in the fourth year of our Program “for the encouragement and conservation of cavity nesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West.”

Thanks especially to the very hard work of a number of individuals and groups we have made marked progress in the original aims: to find people who are involved in such endeavors; to interest more people in the same effort; and to secure and compile the reports of their results at the end of each year.

We have joined other state bluebird groups in becoming (at no cost) an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). With the help of National Audubon Society—California, and the highest quality of editing and publishing of the newsletter by Hatch and Judy Graham our Program name is known nationally over the entire area occupied by the three varieties of bluebirds. We exchange newsletters with many of the independent state organizations and thus are able to share in our newsletter some of their ideas which may prove helpful to our readers. Access to several scientific and authoritative journals has provided sound data for better understanding of the need for such groups.

The nationally published 32 year old *Nature Society News, Voice of the Purple Martin*, published in Griggsville, IL, has kindly publicized our existence and posted our name as friendly neighbors for any of their readers who might wish to secure information on bluebirds in California.

Following receipt by NABS of individual reports from 13 Californians in 1993, the number has grown to 359

(including multiple trails) in 1998. We believe the increase in numbers of mounted nestboxes has substantially increased the numbers of bluebirds in California. The awareness of the public of the habitat problems facing wildlife—and the need for more education in general—can only be viewed as a worthwhile fallout of our Program.

Several County Coordinators and others have either sponsored or actively participated in area-wide workshops to display and distribute information about bluebirds and other cavity nesters, nestboxes, and plans. New acquaintances and contacts have been natural benefits of such meetings.

Through direct and sometimes accidental channels we continue to encounter people who are somehow involved in nestbox placement (perhaps for years) but whom we have not yet reached as participants or learned of their interest. It is a prime goal of the Program to have them become subscribers to the newsletter and to share their expertise with other subscribers. We thank all of our subscribers who, by their interest and cash contributions of the basic annual amount for the newsletter, have supported the expansion of the Program, as well as those who have given larger amounts. Only by such support will we be able to keep the effort afloat.

We have designed and printed a new brochure for publicizing the Program and furnishing an application for subscribers who want to join the ranks. Supplies are available in unlimited numbers for distribution.

Our Editors, **Hatch & Judy Graham**, have updated and printed the 3rd edition of their authoritative *Monitoring Guide* which will be most helpful to both new and experienced birders in caring for their nestboxes. The new edition is ready for distribution.

For approximately 3 years we have had a signed *Memorandum of Understanding* with the U.S. Forest Service, permitting access by our trail monitors to millions of acres controlled by the Service. Cooperation of staff biologists in locating suitable habitat, assistance with monitoring and interchange of trail data is proving beneficial to both organizations.

Just a few thoughts on the past four years. —12/31/98.

NABS TO MEET IN BIG SKY COUNTRY IN JUNE

Montana, the land of vast prairies and magnificent mountain ranges, will host NABS 22nd Annual Meeting. It will be June 17-20 at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, on the banks of the Missouri River in the heart of “Big Sky Country.” Montana is known as one of the most productive areas in the United States for Mountain Bluebirds, and the area around Great Falls has had 25 to 30% of Montana’s fledglings in each of the last 10 years.

While all three species of bluebirds (Mountain, Eastern, and Western) nest in Montana, the Mountain Bluebird is king

The four-day event will include treks along two bluebird trails which produce 500 to 700 fledglings a year.

Don Yoder says, “With California so close we ought not let Nebraska’s boast—to have the most representatives of any State in attendance—go unchallenged.”

Better think about making your plans soon. Contact **Bob Niebuhr** (406) 453-5143 (W) or (406) 761-5842 (H) for full information. Or e-mail him at: BluBrdBob@prodigy.net

Other top producers

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Santa Clara & San Mateo, 203; **Malcolm King**, Mendocino, 154; **David Cook**, Santa Clara, 146; **Carole Miller**, Nevada Co, 120; and **Bill & Doris Allison**, Amador, 114.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

—continued from page 5

Graham was banding his nestlings, Ray expressed interest in a larger trail in his gated subdivision, Sierra Vista. At the same time, **Eugene Loeder**, of Hayward, was building nestboxes with fine redwood lumber supplied by **John Tilford**. This winter **Viola Sampert**, Trail Coordinator, picked up 100 of Gene's boxes and delivered half of them to Hatch. He and Ray erected 11 more in the community. Now Ray has convinced several of his neighbors to put up 14 more. Ray has also agreed to be Trail Coordinator for Sierra Vista to ensure the 30 boxes there are properly monitored. Much of our progress couldn't be achieved without dedicated box-builders like Eugene and donations of materials from folks like John. Our thanks to them and others that we may inadvertently overlook.



Warren Button is another box-builder that has contributed greatly to the Program. He has over 100 boxes scattered across Contra Costa County.



While **Hatch & Judy Graham** were placing hole reducer polycarbonate overlays over the woodpecker enlarged holes on his trail in Amador County, Judy exclaimed, "What's in this box?" It weighed about 6 pounds. It and the next box were filled to the brim with acorns. With minor regrets they dumped the acorns on the ground. If the Acorn Woodpeckers don't retrieve them, the Wild Turkeys probably will. On the same trip, the Graham's search dog, Piper, suddenly showed interest in a box. Looking inside, they found a dead White-Breasted Nuthatch which had perished in the December freeze.

AND A LOOK FORWARD....

There is no way in which we can continue to look back and rest on our laurels, or lean on the nestbox post—satisfied with what has been accomplished. Much remains to be done.

Some examples: Many people are mounting nestboxes but failing to monitor them properly, or to submit their Annual Reports. We want those Annual Reports for evidence of individual involvement and the nesting data which can be reviewed.

New territory for nestboxes continues to be located but not enough Monitors have gotten involved to tend the boxes and record the progress of nesting. Some monitors are working hard and are overworked.

If you can contribute a couple of hours a week, let us hear from you. We'll try awfully hard to fit your talents and location with a working trail.

We hope to expand arrangements, such as our *Memorandum of Understanding* with the **U.S. Forest Service**, to other agencies who oversee vast areas of potential nesting habitat.

We hope to locate an angel or two who will contribute some substantial amounts to the financial welfare of the Program. In the same vein, regular renewal of subscriptions by current members will help assure a firm base on which to support printing and mailing expenses of such a venture.

Groundwork has been laid by **Garth Harwood**, County Coordinator, and **Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society** to emphasize diversification and provide nestboxes for species in addition to bluebirds. Because other varieties occupy bluebird boxes we know that they also have housing shortages. We approve this effort and commend the objective as an example for other birders to adopt. We will add new emphasis to such efforts for the whole Program.

We look forward to progress in completion of the International Nestbox Trail in which our California segment can have a most marked contribution. We look to **NABS** for overall 'supervision' of this interesting project. However, toward such end we can continue to increase our nestbox monitoring up and down the State.

We have a start made but with work yet to be done toward establishing our own Web Site by which many additional contacts can be expected for expansion of the Program.

And we look for your continued participation in the exciting project of providing housing assistance to the favorite Blues. —Don Yoder

Banding dispersal study continues

Five banders involved in the Dispersal Study nearly doubled the number of Western Bluebirds banded in 1998 compared to the previous year. A total 681 birds, including 58 adults, were banded in the study area which includes a strip across the State from Lake Tahoe to the Mendocino Coast.

Other target species—the two cavity-nesting swallows, Tree and Violet-Green, and the Oak Titmouse—were also banded in larger numbers: 232 swallows with 34 adults and 79 titmice with 11 adults.

Monitors are urged to contact the banders—listed on page 11—when ever a clutch is established in a nestbox and you can calculate the estimated hatching date. In this way, banders, schedules permitting, may be able to visit your box and band the setting hen, and then the chicks when they are the proper age.

Thanks to the banders for this valuable research aimed at answering questions such as: How far do the fledglings go to nest? How many nest in the same area from year to year? How long do the birds live?

STANDARD NESTBOX DESIGN FOR WESTERN BLUEBIRDS

based on an original NABS design developed by Larry Zeleny

Bill of Materials:

- 1 pc 1"x 8"x 6' board (cedar or redwood preferred)
- 1½" deck screws or 6d galvanized nails
- 1 scrap of 5/8" or ¾" plywood 9"x 9" square (roof)

Equipment Needed:

- drill with 1½" bit and 3/32" bit (for predrilling)
- table saw or rotary saw
- screwdriver and hammer
- round wood rasp

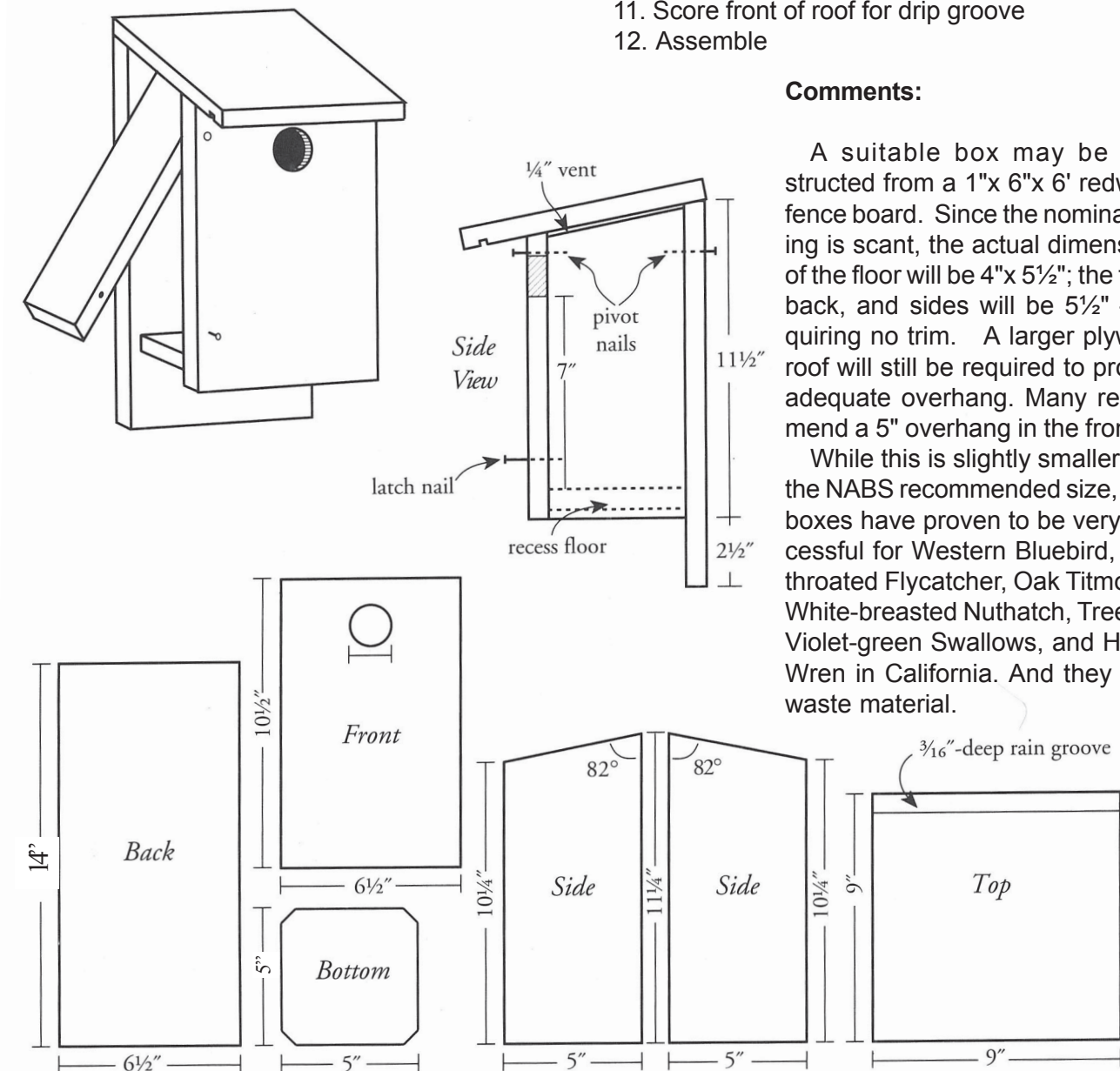
Instructions:

1. Cut board at 24¾" for front and back
2. Rip width to 6½"
3. Cut remainder at 29" for 2 sides and bottom
4. Rip width to 5"
5. Cut front and back into lengths shown below
6. Cut bottom off at 5"; remove corners for drain
7. Cut 2 sides at 82° (or from 10¼" to 11¼")
8. Drill entry hole with 1½" bit
9. Enlarge hole to 1⅞" with wood rasp
10. Predrill holes for screws or nails
11. Score front of roof for drip groove
12. Assemble

Comments:

A suitable box may be constructed from a 1"x 6"x 6' redwood fence board. Since the nominal sizing is scant, the actual dimensions of the floor will be 4"x 5½"; the front, back, and sides will be 5½" —requiring no trim. A larger plywood roof will still be required to provide adequate overhang. Many recommend a 5" overhang in the front.

While this is slightly smaller than the NABS recommended size, such boxes have proven to be very successful for Western Bluebird, Ashthroated Flycatcher, Oak Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tree and Violet-green Swallows, and House Wren in California. And they don't waste material.



Do bluebirds need a tree?

NABS's new quarterly *Bluebird* ran the following article which is of interest to California bluebirders:

A few years ago I attended a bluebird conference where a well-known bluebirder talked about the importance of having a tree or bush nearby for nestlings to fly to on their initial flight from the box. He told me that if a fledgling lands on the ground rather than an elevated perch of some sort, it cannot take flight from the ground but must reach an elevated position to take off again.

This year, another person told me about seeing a bluebird fledgling land on the ground right after leaving the box and that it could not regain its flight. He said he watched the fledgling walk to a small tree, climb up the tree to a low branch, and from there it was able to fly again.

And then just recently I found a fledgling that had left its box and landed in our front yard. As hard as it tried, it could not take flight. I thought it might have fledged prematurely so I put it back into the box and plugged the entrance hole until it calmed down. About an hour later I uncovered the hole and shortly thereafter I watched the same bird fly approximately 75 feet to the safety of a tree.

My question is this:

Has it ever been proven that fledglings cannot regain flight if they land on the ground during their initial flight from the box? If so, it would give more importance to having a bush or tree for the fledgling to fly to on its initial flight.

—Steve Eno, Raymond, Nebraska

The answer comes from **Dorene Scriven**, bluebird expert and author from Minneapolis. She says:

Not one of the many experienced long-time bluebirders I know has actually seen an upward flight from the ground. We have seen the young birds flutter a few inches off the ground to the next drop down. Of course, the possibility is strongly influenced by the type of ground cover (i.e., low smooth lawn would be much easier than tall grass). All in

all, one can make a good argument for some kind of perch within 100 feet of the nestbox.

Ms. Scriven included this information from *The Bluebird—How You Can Help Its Fight for Survival*, by **Lawrence Zeleny**, 1978:

When the young birds first leave the opening of the nesting cavity or box they attempt to fly directly to the nearest tree, shrub, fence, or any other point where they can alight some distance off the ground. They are usually strong enough to fly from 50 to 100 feet on the first attempt....

Shortly after their first flight young bluebirds work their way by means of short flights and hops up into the higher branches of nearby trees. They usually remain well up off the ground for several days, flying from tree to tree while they gain strength and perfect their flying skill.

putting up nestboxes

Schneider Cow Camp

For the sake of bluebird nests I nail these boxes to the native trees, driving in aluminum past the bark to take a solid bite in wood.

For the sake of bluebird, nuthatch, chickadee, I score the red fir bark. Underneath, its flesh is rosy as new meat. The nail sinks.

For the sake of small birds nesting I bring boxes to the trees. Lodgepole with its pebbled hide won't flinch; a dozen strokes to drive one nail.

For the sake of singers, I barb these boxes into wood. Juniper spits out my nail. Aluminum bends. The wood under my hammer sings a song like no.

The aspen shakes her leaves, dead calm, before I drive the nails in. I touch her skin, the trunk holds firm. I speak to her of bluebirds.

—Taylor Graham

First appeared in *South Dakota Review*

3-YR COMPARISON OF ANNUAL REPORTS

How do the 1998 results compare with the last two years? Here's a rundown. The four letter "alpha codes" are listed on sheet 7 of the Annual Report enclosed.

	1996	1997	1998
Reports	180	336	359
Boxes	2400	3642	4142
WEBL	3020	5398	5227
MOBL	137	6	160
ATFL	295	485	562
TRES	477	554	2008
VGSW	30	252	324
HOWR	218	205	445
BEWR	10	18	55
OATI	314	423	627
MOCH	217	54	83
BCCH	35	22	0
CBCH	19	5	66
WBNU	50	93	126
PYNU	0	4	0
RBNU	3	0	0
ACWO	2	0	2
AMKE	0	45	40
COBO	13	0	6
WODU	237	777	1591
Total*	5077	8393	11326

*some minor species not included above

Protecting birds in your nestbox

The range of weather conditions, normal or not, which our State experienced during 1998 require different measures for protection of nest occupants. Against the effects of cold, winterizing a box by closing three of the vents / drains in the bottom, and blocking the ventilation slots under the roof, can be a great help in stopping drafts.

No one has suggested fans or air conditioning to offset the heat buildup a box will experience during hot spells. Practical measures, however, will help. While sometimes frowned upon, hanging boxes on tree trunks protects a considerable heat-absorbing surface and provides shade for part of the day.

On pipes, conduit, or posts in the open, a piece of plywood, mounted so it will shade the roof and other surfaces while retaining an air space between box and panels is often used to good advantage.

Heavy rains also occur, sometimes out of season. Be sure the drainage/vent holes in the bottom are open. Take necessary measures to have a close fit at the joint where the top meets the back panel. The NABS Construction Standards call for a good overhang of the roof all around the box; vents under the roof can thus be better protected.

But even the overhang may not keep out water from lawn sprinklers (such as on golf courses). Here a sprinkler shield may help: use lath-size pieces of wood nailed along the edges of the roof and extending below the bottom of the vent slots to deflect the forceful thrust of such spray. And again, on trees, try to find where nearby sprinkler heads are before you hang a box; then place it with the tree blocking the spray.

Carrying a supply of dry grass with

you when monitoring can often be useful in replacing a wet nest with dry material. Remove the wet nest and occupants; clear the vents; make an artificial nest with the dry grass: put a ball of grass in the bottom; push your fist into the middle of it, spreading it partially to the sides of the box, and set the little cheepers right back into the middle of it. Mom will come home and say "How Great!" and continue feeding the brood. (Betcha!) — Don Yoder

Construction details lauded

"I enjoyed the details of nestbox construction included in the last newsletter," writes **Howard Rathlesberger**, San Mateo County Coordinator.

He comments further:

I like the side or back bottom hinge on my hanging boxes, so that I can have an unobstructed view of the inside of the box. It's easy to peek in before opening all the way. Most commercial boxes I've seen are made so tight that it takes a tool to pry them open. By using 3/4" thick material we get a good lap, so even a modest rain (such as we normally have) is not a problem to a free opening, back or side.

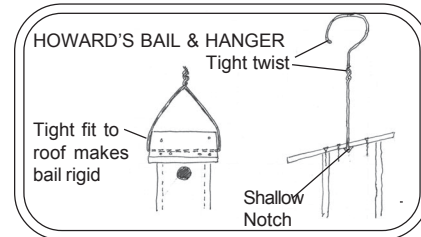
A good overhang all around helps, even if it takes more material. I use 2" #6 deck screws, which I buy by the 1000/box which are about half the 100/box price. When fastening the roof into the end grain of the sides or front and back, I insert the screws at opposed angles so a raccoon has a more difficult time trying to pull the roofs off.

I'm an apostle of **Dick Purvis's** hanging box. Of 34 boxes, 12 were hanging boxes on my Filoli trail. There were 13 nests in the hanging boxes, but only half occupancy in the remaining pole boxes. I prefer mak-

ing the hook (hanger) more substantial, longer and heavier to accommodate larger tree limbs on valley oaks. A longer hook avoids the twiggy growth around the limb.

To avoid getting the box excessively heavy, I reduce the roof overhang. To make the hook rigid to the roof (essential to use in raising in the lifter container), I make the bail of the hook recessed into the sides of the top. My design takes 5 ft. of .150 diam. wire—maybe an overkill, but it's very rugged. This is looped under the roof, folded up, and then the two ends are twisted together with about 10 turns. These double twisted ends are then formed into a question mark hook 3-5" in diam. This is suitable for the tree limb so the house hangs approx. 24" below the limb.

The hook is completely fabricated in a bench vise and then attached by inserting into pre-sawn angular slots in the roof so the box hangs vertically. The hook size is modified to suit the limb selected in the field.



BLUEBIRD LIST

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BLUEBIRDS FLY! 1998 Annual Report Edition

Included in this issue is your 7 double-page spreadsheet with all of the reports received from monitors as of 1 Feb 99 for the 1998 nesting season. It is best read by lifting it out of the newsletter and spreading it out to read across the two pages.

On the back of the annual report is the **INDIVIDUAL NESTBOX RECORD—FORM 1**. This is the form we recommend you use for recording your monitoring activities. It has a front side and back side. You need one form for each of your nestboxes. Copying them on green paper is easy on the eyes.

Now is the time to get ready for the 1999 season. Good luck on your trails!

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- 3-Spotlight on our cavity-nesters—Ash-throated Flycatcher
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- 6-A Look Back
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Cavity-nesters in the news

The *North American Bird Bander*, a publication of the Eastern, Inland, and Western Bird Banding Associations, reports on remarkable returns or recoveries of banded birds. Here are recent ones of interest:

Oak Titmouse banded at an Unknown age at Turtle Bay, Redding, CA on 7 Nov 1992. It was mist-netted there on 13 Oct 1996. At least 4 years old.

House Wren banded as an Adult at Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, AB on 21 Jul 1992. Recaptured there on 31 Jul 1997. At least 6 years old. (This bird had been recaptured 6 previous times.)

Western Bluebird banded as a nestling by staff of NW Ecological Research Institute near Corvallis, OR on 11 May 1994. Was recaptured in a nestbox near Sherwood, OR on 19 Jun 1996. Approx. 65 miles distant.

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BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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