



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

—Assisted by Mount Diablo Audubon Society —
An affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

\$2.50 Per Issue
Suggested
Donation

www.cbrp.org

“For the encouragement and conservation of cavity-nesters — especially bluebirds — anywhere in the West”

OVERALL NESTBOX RESULTS FOR 2015

THE NUMBERS ARE UP

By Dick Blaine

Results for 2015 show an increase in trail reports, installed boxes, total fledglings WEBL fledglings of 6-8% over 2014. The drought in California seems to have affected results of the past several years – overall, results are about 10% less than the 2010-2012 period. See the seven-year summary which is on page four in this issue for details.

Reports were received covering 24 counties, 160 monitors and 307 trails. These show that the 5515 boxes installed on the reported trails yielded some 18051 fledges of which 12018 were Western Blue Birds and the remaining 6033 were distributed among 19 other cavity nesting species. It is sad to note that no Burrowing Owl sightings were reported. I used to see these in the South San Francisco Bay Area regularly on my bike rides ten years ago but have not seen one in many years.

Orange County was again the top producing county (by more than a factor of two) for the number of trails, nest tries, total fledges and Western Bluebird fledges. See the table which follows the county-by-county results. The top producers, again, were **Steve Simmons** (Merced) with 1590 fledglings (mostly Wood Ducks), followed by **Lee Pauser** (Santa Clara), **Dick Purvis** (Orange) and **Irv Tiessen** (Alameda) each of whom fledged more than 1000. See the table which follows for results by monitor.

The last table summarizes CBRP results for seven years only because of space (1996-2015). From 1996 thru 2006 trail-by-trail data were collected from handwritten worksheets, summarized by county coordinators and entered into a statewide spreadsheet. From 2007 thru 2011 box-by-box, trail-by-trail data were entered by monitors directly into a homegrown database. For the past four years trail-by-trail data were entered by monitors directly into a shared, on-line spreadsheet. Each method has had its own problems resulting in some inaccuracies. In particular the number of nest tries was incorrect from 2007-2011 leading to errors in all ratios and percentages based on that quantity. Note that for the past few years the number of nest tries is again approximately equal to the number of boxes and so, the resulting ratios are more accurate.

If you would like to enter additional detail (box-by-box) with dates and additional information, I strongly encourage you to participate in Cornell University's e-bird and/or Nestwatch programs. See

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/> and <http://nestwatch.org/>



The Director's Chair

Another nesting season completed - another year! Happy New Year to all of you and many thanks for participating in our program. One of our major accomplishments in 2015 was to upload the box-by-box results for 2006-2011 to Cornell University's Nestwatch program. We no longer collect box-by-box data and so Nestwatch will not accept the data we collect. Hopefully that will change in the future. See a recommendation elsewhere in this issue on database formats.

Thanks to all of you who entered your 2015 nestbox results on-line. We used Google Docs again this year for on-line, shared data collection with few problems. I continue to look for a better/simpler way to collect data but have not found one.



The 2015 Annual Report is not included in this issue because of the size and cost of printing and mailing. The report is available in full color for viewing and/or downloading on our web site: at http://www.cbrp.org/annual_reports/ar2015.pdf. Several articles summarizing the 2015 results will be found in this issue of *Bluebirds Fly!*. 2015 results are similar to those for 2014. Note that this and previous newsletters and annual reports as well as updated state results (20 year history, box-by-box and trail-by-trail data) are also available on our web site. Link to <http://www.cbrp.org> and look under "Program Results".

Special thanks to those of you who made donations to CBRP in 2015 (amounting to \$1214 in 2H 2015 and \$1779 for the year) - see the 2nd half 2015 donor list elsewhere in this issue. Again this year donations barely cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter. I am reluctant to ask for dues and prefer to encourage donations. If donations decline from present levels I will revert to on-line newsletters only. Following your name on the mailing label for this issue of *Bluebirds Fly!* are two numbers. The first is the date of your most recent contribution in the form yyyymm and the second is the amount in the form \$\$\$\$. If these fields are blank then you have not made a contribution in the past three years. My practice is to remove monitors/contributors from the contact list after three years with no activity.

California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) Board Members

Dick Blaine, Program Director — dick@theblaines.net

Dave Cook, Board Member — justdave50@comcast.net

Georgette Howington, Asst. Program Director —
georgette@birdscape.net

Jim Semelroth, Editor, — jimsemweed@cox.net

Dick Purvis, Recruiting — dickersly@aol.com

Each quarter I enjoy reading *Bluebird, Journal of the North American Bluebird Society*. This publication contains interesting articles and beautiful color photographs pertaining to Bluebirds and other cavity nesters. CBRP and SCBC (Southern California Bluebird Club in Orange County) are Affiliate members of this nation-wide organization. As such our members are eligible for an introductory (Affiliate) membership for only \$15; membership thereafter is \$20. Their web page is at <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/index.htm>. To join as an affiliate member, link to <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/aplus/> and specify that you are a member of CBRP or SCBC).

Remember to start getting ready for the 2016 nesting season by cleaning and repairing your nest boxes by the end of February. Happy New Year and happy 2016 birding.

Dick Blaine - dick@theblaines.net
CBRP Web site - <http://cbrp.org>



1940 Vintage nestbox
Not a recommended design

About the California Bluebird Recovery Program Founder - Don Yoder; Emeritus - Hatch Graham

Our Mission

Enlist current bluebirders and recruit others who will help reestablish bluebirds to their normal habitat

- ◆ Locate preferred habitat for the placement of nestboxes suitable for bluebirds
- ◆ Secure monitors to care for the boxes and keep systematic records of the development of young birds during the nesting season
- ◆ Record and analyze all annual summaries of nestbox records
- ◆ Provide a forum (newsletter) through which fellow trail monitors can exchange information and secure help in solving problems encountered in the field.

Learn More

To learn more about the California Bluebird Recovery Program and other cavity nester conservation programs, visit the below web sites:

<http://www.cbrp.org>

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>

<http://www.socalbluebirds.org>

<http://www.sialis.org>

If you are looking for a mentor, start by contacting the county coordinator in your county listed on page 12. You can also contact **Dick Blaine** (dick@theblaines.net) or **Dick Purvis** (dickersly@aol.com).

Please consider supporting our efforts. There is a donation form on the back page of this newsletter. Your contribution is tax-deductible and goes a long way in helping us conserve the bluebird population in California.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Average*
Counties	19	24	24	20	20	20	24	25
Reporters	174	192	168	170	169	157	160	186
Species	17	23	26	21	24	21	20	20
Boxes (N)	4189	5274	5426	5293	5664	5067	5601	4437
Tries (T)	2937	3939	3202	5715	5715	5096	5526	3847
T/N	0.7	0.7	0.6	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	1
Eggs (E)	21762	28751	28386	28423	27876	24058	26262	23630
E/N	5.2	5.5	5.2	5.4	4.9	4.7	4.7	5
E/T	7.4	7.3	8.9	5.0	4.9	4.7	4.8	6
Chicks (H)	17967	23014	22794	22747	22489	19481	21234	19006
H/N	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.0	3.8	3.8	4
H/T	6.1	5.8	7.1	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	5
H/E	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1
Fledged (F)	15781	20737	20323	20477	19754	17056	18144	15477
F/N	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.2	3
F/T	5.4	5.3	6.3	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.3	4
F/E	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	1
F/H	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1

2014 notes Reductions from 2013 are almost entirely explained by the illness of **Dick Purvis**, Orange County.
...

2015 notes results are down 10% from pre-drought years (2010-2012)
...



COUNTY BLUEBIRD COORDINATORS MEETING

2015 DONATIONS		COUNTY BY COUNTY TOTALS		
Donations in 2H 2015		County	Tot Fledge	WEBL Fledge
2H 2015 Donations: \$1214		24	18051	12128
2015 total Donations: \$1779		Orange	6485	5906
Donor	County	Santa Clara	3001	1307
Ohlone Audubon	Alameda	Los Angeles	1797	1770
Jean Caggiano	San Diego	Merced	1620	286
Susan Carder	San Mateo	Alameda	1043	596
Free Clarke	Orange	Contra Costa	822	502
JoAnn Coller	Orange	Sacramento	466	229
Melva Foley	Orange	San Mateo	463	216
Jim & Marj Freda	San Diego	Placer	392	175
Catherine Gudmundson	Santa Clara	Nevada	355	189
Elena Hery	Orange	Madera	303	22
Roger & Joan Kneeland	Orange	Amador	290	158
Sharon Kramer	Orange	Riverside	278	278
Cindy Lockhart	San Mateo	Santa Barbara	150	125
Joan Loney	Santa Clara	San Bernardino	129	119
Chuck Lowrie	Amador	Corona	116	111
North American Bluebird Society		Shasta	89	51
Martha O'Neal	San Mateo	San Diego	83	39
Lee & Janna Pauser	Santa Clara	Sonoma	61	18
Mary C Steele	Orange	Yuba	53	11
Sara Tancredy	Contra Costa	Tuolumne	24	20
Christine Tischer	Orange	Ventura	19	0
Erica Walden	San Mateo	Mariposa	12	0
Stephen Wright	Santa Clara	Mendocino	0	0



Daddy's home

With much gratitude, we accept these donations.

Monitor	Tot Fledge	WEBL Fledge	Monitor	Tot Fledge	WEBL Fledge
160	18051	12128	160	18051	12128
Simmons, Steve	1590	286	Sommers-		
Pauser, Lee	1198	553	Bernhardt, Tina	97	97
Purvis, Dick	1115	1115	Isaacson, Mike	95	95
Tiessen, Irv	1043	596	Kimbrey, Ian	91	91
Bulger, Susan	578	578	Sieburth, Dessi	91	91
Butler, Vicki	460	223	Hermanson, Cole	89	9
Tischer, Christine	377	52	Jordan, Larry	89	51
Hurst, Kappy	376	358	Kvaska, Colleen	84	84
Ralph, Bill	345	22	Dardis, Tomas	83	83
Jennings, Candy	343	322	Orcholski, Gerald	83	83
Violett, Linda	309	291	Coller, Jo-Ann	81	81
Keally, Bob	295	295	Azevedo, Mike	79	32
Snyder, Erin	273	273	Carr, Caryl	77	21
Klahn, Allen	266	113	Goldberg, Toby	77	10
Wallace, Bill	252	252	Hery, Elena	76	76
Venhuizen, John	246	199	Lorenzen, Don	73	19
Franz, Bob	241	236	Gray, Linda	72	62
Fulton, Larry	233	233	Chase, Jeff	71	53
Miller, Joan	223	218	King, Robin	71	66
Kneeland, Roger	214	214	White, Beverly	71	71
Allison, Bill and Doris	201	149	Wills, John	68	0
Cook, Dave	188	103	Brittain, Bob and		
Josten, Walter	169	169	Cindy	67	35
Rogers, Jim & Con-			Gudmundson, Kate	67	56
nie	167	62	Miller, Anne	67	29
Guerrero, Susana	163	163	Deas, Ian & Karin	62	45
Kent, Anthony	163	23	Loney, Joan	62	19
Jordan, Kim	160	160	Persons, Phil	61	18
Vargas, Norm	157	151	Wallace, Bill & Inge	61	58
Elvin, Fran	151	27	Carder, Suzanne	60	5
Wright, Steve	150	150	Leach, LaVerne	60	39
Millett, Jerry	149	149	Wetzel, Peter	59	23
Suan, Robin	149	149	Winning, Ethan	59	50
Pahl, Janel	142	142	McClure, Mary	57	57
Howington,			Bostelman, Rusty	56	47
Georgette	131	55	Klein, Stephanie	56	0
Franz, Norm	128	128	Lockhart, Cynthia	56	37
Hall, Luise	127	89	Miller, Cheri	55	49
Covington, Bill	126	62	Brennan, Kate	54	29
Miller, Gus	125	125	Kirk, Bridgette	53	11
Abeyta, Ray	121	121	Farber, Marion	52	29
Chandler, Joe	120	120	Morse, Frances	49	32
Rogers, Jim & Connie	112	50	Larry Spivak	48	0
Willey, Barbara	112	87	Huber, Al	47	4
Clark, Patricia	111	34	King, Trish	44	39
Osaki, Maddri	104	104	Walden, Erica	44	28
Coller, Jo-Ann	102	83	Beattie, Tom	43	25
O'Neal, Martha	102	23	Bride, Joe	41	5
Livesey, Gary	101	101	Croom, Tom	40	40
Sinex, Valerie	101	94	Glaser, Fred	39	36
			Ludden, Doug	38	38
			McTighe, Sarah	38	18

Mother Nature's Effect on Passerine Egg Laying

For several recent nesting seasons I have had suspicions that the first egg dates for some of the passerine species that grace my nest boxes are occurring earlier and earlier. TRESs used to begin nesting after the WEBLs had nestlings, but now the two species seem to begin on nearly the same schedule.

To add credence to my suspicions, I queried my 2010-2015 records for the first egg dates of my most common passerine species which are TRES and WEBL. The resulting data is provided below, and shows a general trend of earlier dates. For example, the median first egg date for TRES in 2010 was May 26th, and in 2015 the median date was April 30th—almost a month earlier than in 2010.

Similarly, the median date for WEBLs in 2010 was April 29th, and in 2015 the median date was April 21st—only about a week earlier, but still earlier.

The fact that TRES are nesting earlier increases the contention for nest boxes, and likely increases the number of eggs and nestlings that disappear. Adding more nest boxes may reduce the contention.

Lee Pauser

Brood #1 First Egg Dates							
Year	Brood #	Species	# Broods	Total # Eggs	Earliest 1st Egg	Median 1st Egg Date	Latest 1st Egg
2010	1	TRES	10	49	5/7/2010	5/26/2010	6/12/2010
2011	1	TRES	22	115	4/25/2011	5/12/2011	6/25/2011
2012	1	TRES	36	183	4/23/2012	5/13/2012	6/23/2012
2013	1	TRES	72	352	4/7/2013	5/1/2013	6/17/2013
2014	1	TRES	79	380	4/18/2014	5/3/2014	6/13/2014
2015	1	TRES	89	441	4/2/2015	4/30/2015	6/12/2015
2010	1	WEBL	59	279	3/7/2010	4/29/2010	6/30/2010
2011	1	WEBL	80	391	4/12/2011	4/28/2011	6/24/2011
2012	1	WEBL	107	530	4/9/2012	4/29/2012	6/28/2012
2013	1	WEBL	130	629	3/19/2013	4/19/2013	6/8/2013
2014	1	WEBL	139	642	3/19/2014	4/19/2014	6/6/2014
2015	1	WEBL	138	642	3/20/2015	4/21/2015	6/19/2015

15% drop in fledged birds, with a strong indication of drought caused stress with high nest mortality.. **Larry Jordan**

Tough year at park; lake dried up completely for first time. **Peter Wetzel**

Drought evidence a problem; climate change. **Anne Miller**

Data entry was not easy for me. **Bill and Doris Allison**

1 box remained empty all season. 2 boxes with 1st. season nest appeared to be ramshakled by squirrels or other critter. 2 boxes went missing in mid season. **Susana Guerrero**

Had titmice in previous years, super excited to get 6 healthy bluebirds this year. Not sure what a standard box means, got our through the So. Cal Bluebird club, **Kevin and Eileen Lilliewhite**

A pair of VGSW was in and out of one of the boxes (the one that's usually productive) regularly for 2-3 weeks in June. Then (abruptly, it seemed to me) there was no more activity. Given past history, when I opened the box, I expected at least to find a nest (and maybe even some eggs), but there was only some grass and a few feathers--not a complete nest. In general, it seemed to me there were far fewer VGSW in our area (and other kinds **Marybeth Arago**

NEST BOX INVASION BY KING SNAKE

In spring of 2015 our nest box with BB fledglings was hanging from a rafter in the patio. The adults were fluttering about the exit hole to encourage the fledglings to exit, which they did. Hanging from a ventilation hole, we observed the tail of what turned out to be a California king snake. The snake (~2.5 feet long) then exited the box via the exit hole. A branch of a potted shrub was in contact with the box and provided ingress for the snake. The snake did no damage, but we moved the potted plant to prevent any future invasions of the box.

Floyd Sabins

MOTHER'S DAY MIRACLE

Early Mother's Day morning I checked a local box and found a dead mother bluebird on top on 5 cold lifeless day old babies. I rushed the babies the 2 miles home. When I got home I asked my wife to get our heating pad. In the meantime I held the cold lifeless babies in my hand one at a time warming them. My wife returned with the heating pad into which we placed the babies. Then I took 1 at a time and pushed lightly on their breasts and 3 of the tiny hearts starting beating. We then drove to 3 local boxes with babies 1-3 days old and carefully placed one baby at a time in their new foster nest. The miracle of feeling the lifeless bodies returning to life will be one we will cherish the rest of my life. **Bob Keally**

We have a number of bluebird boxes up and had at least three successful hatchings this year. Of note, one of my boxes is in the full sun. I have been trying to move the boxes along our fence line so that they are shaded during the hottest part of the day but this box had eggs before I got it moved. The birds were getting close to fledging just as we went into one of our 100 degree plus weeks and I was greatly concerned that the babies would die from the heat.

I tried putting up a sail affair that would cast a shadow on the nest box in the afternoon. That was a failure. Not only could I not keep the "sail" open, but I think the parents decided it was a hawk and wouldn't approach the nest.

Then I hit upon the idea of putting a false roof on top of the existing roof with an airway between the two. I made the top roof about 8" longer in the front than the original and about 1" wider along the sides. The top was white to reflect the sunlight and I nailed 1"x 3/4" runners to the bottom of the new roof along the sides, thus forming an air space from front to back. The nest box was facing the sun in the but cast a shadow over most of the front of the nest box which to work on that part although it did stay in place for the most part. The other thing I did was make the back piece longer and cut the center of it out in a U shape to fit around both sides of the metal stake to which the box is attached. I was pleased to see that all five babies survived the heat wave and I am sure the additional roof didn't hurt and maybe did help. **Mary Hess**

The parents approached the box again as soon as I moved off.

More California Nesting Data

Last month we told you about a <http://nestwatch.org> " and search for Massive data upload from the California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP), and mentioned that another 2,000+ nests were on their way. Well, they've arrived...2,129 nest records to be exact. These nest records come to us from **Lee Pauser**, an active member of the CBRP, and a volunteer for the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society's Cavity Nesters Recovery Program.



This recent addition to our bulk-imported data features 18 species and spans 14 years (that's 6,796 fledglings!), resulting in very good coverage of the San Francisco Bay area. Lee also works with the Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley to retrieve any abandoned Barn Owl nestlings for treatment and rehabilitation (severe droughts in the area can lead to starvation and nest abandonment).

If you or someone you know has lots of old nest records that have not been permanently archived elsewhere, inquire about whether <http://nestwatch.org> and a search for "Bulk Import tool" can work for you.

From the September 2015 *Nestwatch eNews*:

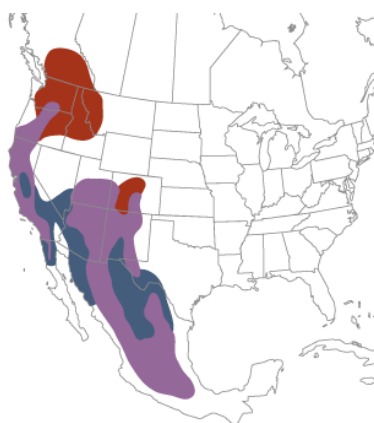
Lee Pauser Bulk Upload

URBAN ADAPTATION OF THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD

By Carol Killebrew, San Diego County CBRP Coordinator

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Western Bluebirds are numerous and populations have been increasing since 1966. Partners in Flight estimates a global population of 6.7 million with 67 percent spending some part of the year in the U.S., 52 percent in Mexico

Range: Southern British Columbia through much of western U.S. into Mexico. (map by Paul Lehman)



winter ■ summer ■ year round

Over much of its range the Western Bluebird population trend appears to be increasing. This is a reversal of the earlier decline as a result of loss of nest cavities to logging, fire suppression, and from competition for cavities from non-native European Starlings and House Sparrows. The Western Bluebird is not considered a "threatened" or "endangered" species. Its current conservation status is listed as "Least Concern" by the IUCN Red List. And in San Diego County, despite many competitors for nest sites, the Western Bluebird appears to be extending its breeding range.

Phil Unitt, curator of birds at the San Diego Natural History Museum, has published a nice book: San Diego County Bird Atlas. In his book, Unitt states that summer and winter bird counts since the late 1990's indicate the Western Bluebird is holding its own in the foothills and mountains of San Diego County, and showing signs of spreading into urban areas with mature trees and wide lawns. He says in the late 1980's, Nuttall's Woodpecker started adapting in San Diego County, moving into the city wherever it was landscaped with wood-pecker friendly trees like liquid-amber, birch, alder, eucalyptus and even agave. This cavity excavator helped pave the way for two secondary cavity nesters, the House Wren and Western Bluebird.

Unitt also says that more people are putting up birdhouses, making the nesting boxes an increasing factor in the spread of the House Wren and Western Bluebird. He also sees a pattern emerging: many arboreal species that can live in a stratum above us people on the ground ultimately adapt to urbanization, while terrestrial and undergrowth species retreat.

More information about Western Bluebirds in San Diego County can be found at the "Bluebirds of San Diego County" website at: <http://cbrp.org/SDBluebirds>

THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD CHOSEN CALIFORNIA BIRD OF THE YEAR

<http://ca.audubon.org/press-release/western-bluebird-wins-audubon-californias-2015-bird-year>

San Francisco, CA – One of California’s most beloved birds today was named the 2015 Audubon California Bird of the Year. The Western Bluebird – which throughout the Western United States, Canada and Mexico – received the designation after totaling nearly more than 30 percent of votes cast during an online poll this fall.

Audubon recently designated the Western Bluebird as Climate Threatened, as it is predicted to lose about 60 percent of its winter range by 2080. Researchers believe that the bird can adapt to new areas, but it will be important for us to preserve forest and tree health to ensure that habitat is available.

“Every one of the nominated birds is beloved by Californians, but no one can be surprised to see the Western Bluebird win this year,” said Brigid McCormack, executive director of Audubon California. “For a lot of people, the joy of seeing this bird in the wild was their introduction to a lifetime love of nature.”

More than 4,500 votes were cast in this year’s Bird of the Year poll. The Western Bluebird finished with 30.6 percent of the vote. The American Kestrel came in second place with 25.6 percent, while the Western Tanager was a distant third at 13.1 percent.

“Each of the nominated birds was a focus of our conservation work in 2015,” said McCormack. “Our hope is that the attention this award brings to the Western Bluebird will help raise awareness of the conservation needs of all birds throughout the state. Go out and look for the Western Bluebird – while you’re out there, you’ll no doubt see a lot of other amazing California birds.”

Of course, we in the California Bluebird Recovery Program believe that our efforts have contributed mightily to the recovery of this precious bird. The charts included in this newsletter are evidence of the tremendous effort our members exert each year. With our nestboxes and cavity conservation effort we have allowed the bluebirds and other cavity nesters and dead and dying tree species to survive and thrive.



D.Seignious

Close Encounters with a Burying Beetle

Several nesting seasons ago I opened a nest box expecting to find thriving nestlings, but instead found the entire clutch of nestlings to be dead. While inspecting the remains I was startled when one of the thoroughly dead nestlings moved rapidly up and down several times. After removing the nest, I discovered several Burying Beetles at work under the nestlings. I have encountered the beetles several times since, but it is always at the expense of nestlings.



The American burying beetle (sp. *Nicrophorus americanus*) is a rather interesting insect, and has been on the U.S. endangered species list since 1989.

Lee Pauser

San Jose, CA

Something to Consider... It May be Time for a Change...

It might be time for the California Bluebird Recovery Program to consider changing from reporting only summaries of nestings to reporting individual nest results like we did for so many years with our earlier data entry system. All the data from our earlier years have been uploaded and added to the vast Cornell University NestWatch data bank. However, none of the of the CBRP results since 2011 can be shared or used by Cornell NestWatch.

NestWatch is a nest-monitoring project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center aimed to provide a unified nest-monitoring scheme to track reproductive success for all North American breeding birds. NestWatch.org invites people who are interested in the natural world to help monitor the success of nesting birds and better understand the threats they face. These data provide a wealth of information about breeding birds and the factors that influence their success across different landscapes.

It might be a little more work to enter data by individual nest, but isn't it more beneficial to be able to share the data with NestWatch so it can be utilized for scientific research?

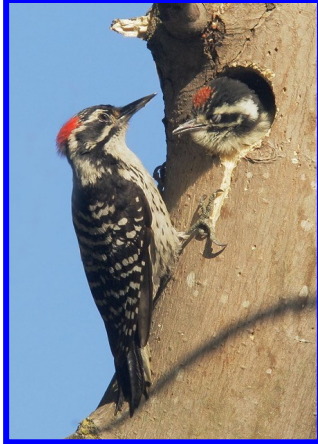
It may be time for CBRP to make the transition to join forces with NestWatch so that our data can actually be used for bird research.

Carol Killebrew,

THE SUBURBAN BLUEBIRD'S BEST NEIGHBOR

By Gillian Martin

The Western Bluebird has a good neighbor in California, one that has proved to be a highly successful suburbanite. The Nuttall's Woodpecker. Its ability to adapt to busy human landscapes, and the fact that it excavates holes all year long, allows it to be a constant home builder for bluebirds where boxes are unavailable. By supporting this and other woodpeckers, we help bluebirds everywhere.



The secret of the Nuttall's success is speculative. However, it appears to have a high tolerance for human activity. It utilizes small sections of rotting wood in live trees in which to nest, and is known to raise a family in a stump three feet off the ground. Even some palms are acceptable to the Nuttalls. Not only will it eat our urban insects, it extracts sap from sapsucker wells and supplements its diet with nuts, seeds, flower buds and berries. Let's support this thriving, suburban woodpecker!

Photo by **Tom Grey**

If you spot an abandoned or active nest site of a woodpecker, or one foraging in a dead tree, consider bringing the tree to the attention of its property owner. Convey the value of the tree and encourage its retention. Offer this link for more information: cavityconservation.com. *The Cavity Conservation Initiative* is a program of the Southern California Bluebird Club. We are working for a sustainable future for bluebirds.



MOUNTAINEERING



BRINGIN' HOME THE BACON

DUKE STUDY EXAMINES EVOLUTIONARY CONSEQUENCES OF BLUEBIRD AGGRESSION

DURHAM, N.C. -- In findings that may offer insight into how evolution operates, a Duke University evolutionary ecologist reported evidence that aggressive male western bluebirds out-compete less aggressive males for preferred breeding territories. In the process, she found that more-aggressive and milder mannered birds also tended to breed in different settings that favor different body types.

This study, conducted by Renée Duckworth, Ph.D., suggests the birds may play more active roles in their own natural selection than traditional models of evolution would support.

"The traditional view of evolution is that organisms are passive creatures on which natural selection operates," said Duckworth, who just completed her doctoral training at Duke. But her research results, published online on Wednesday, April 12, 2006, in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, suggest a different model, at least among these bluebirds.

"By selecting the environment in which they live, animals can actively affect the natural selection they experience," Duckworth said in an interview. "The main message of this study is that the ability of organisms to choose their environment needs to be made a more explicit part of evolutionary theory."

In her studies, funded by the National Science Foundation, Duckworth followed up on previous findings that adult western bluebirds aggressively defend large breeding territories and also use different foraging strategies in wooded and open habitats.

Duckworth set out to investigate the evolutionary consequences of aggression, selecting western bluebirds as her study animal. Western bluebird males prefer to breed in territories with more than one nest available. And they readily accept human-made nest boxes as substitutes for the hollowed out cavities they occupy in the wilds.

On a ranch in Montana, Duckworth created a breeding ground by setting out nest boxes to attract the birds. In addition, she purposely manipulated the densities of the nest boxes, putting two rather than one in some territories in order to test whether more-aggressive males were better at acquiring territories with multiple nests.

Duckworth measured each male's aggressiveness by observing its response to a tree swallow that she placed near a nest box. Tree swallows are a rival species known to compete with bluebirds for nesting spaces in the wilds. In order to avoid injury to the birds, she enclosed the swallows in cages placed near individual nest boxes. She observed the bluebirds' reactions from a nearby blind.

She found that when she manipulated the densities of nest boxes prior to the birds' arrival at the breeding ground, more-aggressive males did, indeed, acquire territories with multiple boxes. But when she manipulated the densities after the birds already had settled on territories, the responses of more- and less-aggressive males did not differ.

"Taken together, these experiments show that, first, aggression plays a key role in determining the outcome of territorial interactions, and, second, male aggression is set before they ever get to their territories," Duckworth said. "These results support my previous findings that males are highly consistent in their aggressive behavior and can be categorized as either aggressive or nonaggressive."

"If the sorting of aggressive and nonaggressive males into different habitats is consistent over time, then it could set the stage for ecological divergence," Duckworth said.

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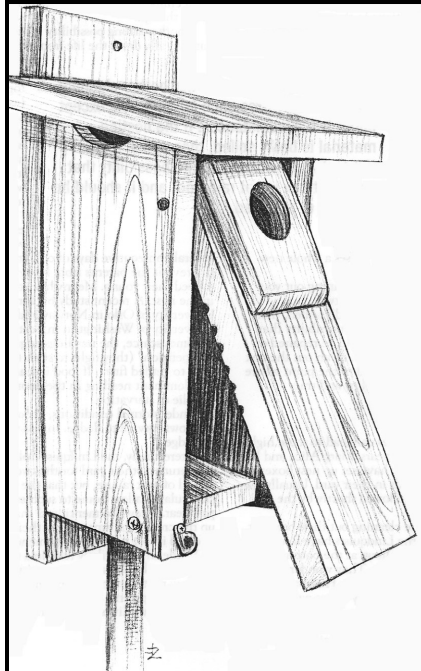
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