



# BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

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

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[www.cbrp.org](http://www.cbrp.org)

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

## WHAT'S FOR DINNER BLUEBIRD?

By **Gillian Martin**

I recently stumbled upon a data base that revealed the diet of the Western Bluebird. It will come as no surprise that it is primarily animal matter, about 81% according to author, Joh L. Capinera, in his book *Insects and Wildlife*. You probably also know that such findings are a result of observing bluebirds and examining their stomach contents after death. Capinera reminds us that “wildlife optimize their food intake based on energy and nutrition derived, balanced against energy expended in obtaining food.” Availability and developmental needs also impact what birds eat or are fed by parents.



The following is the breakdown provided by Capinera. A quick comparison with the Mountain Bluebird revealed that the latter eats significantly more ants and less fruit.

- 24% beetles and weevils
- 21.3 grasshoppers and crickets
- 20% caterpillars
- 14.8% fruit
- 6.7% bees, wasps and ants (mostly ants)
- 6.4% leafhoppers, treehoppers, white flies and aphids
- 2.1% other animals (mostly spiders)
- 1.2% weed seed
- 0.7% flies
- 0.1% other insects

The photo by **Tom Grey**





## The Director's Chair

This summer I actually remembered to start preparing the newsletter in May. This will give our editor, **Jim Semelroth**, time to prepare the summer newsletter without the usual last minute rush. This has been an interesting birding year for me. I see one result of climate change in the species which frequent our yard and their timing. For example, for the first time I am seeing Oak Titmouses at our feeders and for the first time in many years there are no Pine Siskins gracing our yard.



Please enter your end-of-season data into the CBRP data-entry spreadsheet. I would like to start working on the 2017 annual report early and so would like to have all of your data entered by December 1, 2017. **Attention Santa Clara County (CNRP) trial monitors:** I would like to have your (preliminary) data by September 1 in time for our annual meeting.

CBRP data entry spreadsheet:

CBRP collects aggregate data by species and trail (not detailed nestbox by nestbox data)

<https://goo.gl/jgMK5v> or

[https://drive.google.com/open?](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1haZZCx2HM_n8zg_yKJrMlnAbsLulCRQorvFi1vi3WiI)

[id=1haZZCx2HM\\_n8zg\\_yKJrMlnAbsLulCRQorvFi1vi3WiI](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1haZZCx2HM_n8zg_yKJrMlnAbsLulCRQorvFi1vi3WiI)

Cornell's NESTWATCH:

NestWatch collects detailed box-by-box by species by trail information suitable for scientific research. Please participate in their program as well.

Documentation for Cornell NestWatch Bulk Upload Template:

Download to your computer for your reference.

<https://goo.gl/PqHXiX> or

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/14Irg7cS02GrClgj-q5ENVZ6Q14M3LpkWFR4Fh24YcM/edit>

## California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) Board Members

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Dick Purvis, Recruiting — [dickersly@aol.com](mailto:dickersly@aol.com)

### NestWatch Bulk Upload Template (Spreadsheet)

Download to your computer, review the instructions sheet (sheet1) and then enter the data for each nest box and each trail into sheet2. Send to me ([dick@theblaines.net](mailto:dick@theblaines.net)) and I will review and forward to NestWatch.

<https://goo.gl/6eQA9f> or

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B8OLjlvu4wKlZm5NcDhHUFNKX2s>

Special thanks to those of you who made donations to CBRP this year - see the donor list elsewhere in this issue. Donations barely cover the cost of printing and mailing this 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.

**Dick Blaine** - [dick@theblaines.net](mailto:dick@theblaines.net)



Photo by  
Joe DiStefano

## 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>

[sdbluebirds@cox.net](mailto:sdbluebirds@cox.net)

<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](mailto:dick@theblaines.net)) or **Dick Purvis** ([dickersly@aol.com](mailto: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.

## WILDLIFE-TRAINED TREE CARE WORKERS ACT

### AS FIRST RESPONDERS FOR BABY HAWKS



Not all first responders show up to handle emergencies with flashing lights, blaring sirens and recognizable badges.

Some are simple men in orange shirts and helmets like West Coast Arborists' Foreman, Francisco Villanueva, and his crew. On May 24 they were called to McClatchy Park in Sacramento, California, to remove a fallen elm, but then unexpectedly discovered a wildlife emergency.

The elm had fallen onto a nearby tree in which there was a nest of a Red-shouldered Hawk. The impact was enough to dislodge the nest and eject its four nestlings. Because West Coast Arborists invests in wildlife-training for their crews to prevent, but also be prepared for such an emergency, Francisco knew what to do before he called Jason Pinegar, his area manager. He gloved his hands and placed the four baby hawks in a deep cardboard box for safety.

Jason took the second step they were trained to do. He called the nearest wildlife rehabilitation center. When he did not get an answer, he drove the birds there. No flashing lights and siren signaled his critical drive. On arrival at the Wildlife Care Association and Education Center the birds were immediately hydrated and then quickly dispatched back to their home site where Francisco and his crew were

already in the process of reconstructing a sturdy nest using new branches and some of the old nesting material. While the birds' concerned parent circled above, the crew safely reinstated them in a nearby tree. The crisis was handled in under two hours.

On June 7, after the crew allowed enough time for the birds to mature and leave their nest, they returned to the site to complete some minor pruning. All four birds had already "graduated" from the nest and were testing their new wings in the park. Who can read this and not clap with glee!

The Cavity Conservation Initiative, in partnership with West Coast Arborists, founded the [Tree Care for Birds and other Wildlife](#) project in California with the intent of setting best management practices (as this crew modeled) to reduce harm to nesting birds during tree care. Over 140 participants, representing the arboriculture industry, wildlife advocates and many others are engaged to deliver these newly developed standards to the tree care industry throughout the State.







We are proud to promote [Sims Tree Learning Center](#) as a highly qualified trainer. Their Wildlife Aware programs are available in northern and southern California. One is scheduled at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine, CA. on 9 October 2017. The Sanctuary is home to Sea and Sage Audubon (a supporter of the project), which in conjunction with the Irvine Ranch Water District, the property owner, is generously providing their beautiful Learning Center for the training.

Reservations for this date or others can be made by contacting [dawson@simstlc.com](mailto:dawson@simstlc.com) or [scheduler@simstic.com](mailto:scheduler@simstic.com).

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Gillian Martin, The Cavity Conservation Initiative, a project of the Southern California Bluebird Club



COUNTY BLUEBIRD COORDINATORS MEETING

### STRINGS ARE DANGEROUS TO BIRDS

The crows were having a raucous gathering nearby. The cawing went on and on until I stopped preparing dinner and went out to see what caused the commotion. A crow kept trying to fly off my neighbor's chain link fence but fell back each time. It must be caught, I thought. The neighbors were on a trip and we were watching their home so I climbed over the fence and got a closer look. Then I called to my daughter to bring a pair of scissors. We were able to cut fishing line off the crow's ankle and set it free. What a thrill to hold a live, wild bird and learn how light and warm it was. It felt good to have saved a life as well.

At that time I had no idea that birds would be a big part of my future. Later, in August 1998, a beautiful cobalt blue male Western Bluebird perched in my Jacaranda tree and startled me with his beauty. I knew right away that I wanted him to visit my yard often. Little by little I enticed him with a bird bath and mealworms. By chance I learned that a man placed bird houses around the county for the bluebirds to nest in and this was why bluebirds were in my neighborhood. As part of the effort to bring back bluebirds from alarming population declines nest boxes are being placed all over the nation inspired by the North American Bluebird Society. The boxes are an acceptable, but temporary substitute for dwindling natural cavities which bluebirds need for nesting. The California Bluebird Recovery Program is an affiliated group of volunteers who provide nest boxes for bluebirds and other cavity nesters all over the state as well as education to teach people to save their critical habitat of dead and dying trees in which woodpeckers create the cavities for themselves and other cavity nesting birds. I have joined these two groups and become a nest box monitor. Now I enjoy thousands of interesting close encounters with birds.

Several years ago, while checking a nest box, I noticed one of the two bluebird chicks was smaller than the other and the father was not around. Wanting them both to survive, I decided to bring mealworms over the next ten days or so until they fledged. Fledge day came for one bird but the second remained in the box for several more days. Sometimes I could hear cheeping in the box. Knowing one was smaller I expected it to stay inside longer. When it appeared that the birds were gone, I checked the box and was saddened to find the chick dead. Its foot was tangled in a four inch piece of fishing line which was entwined with some grasses. I was amazed that such a little piece of string could kill a bird.

Tragedies like this are seen by nest box monitors all too often. We see plastic Easter grass, fishing line, kite string, gift wrap ribbon; pieces of frayed blue tarps, yarn, shredded baseballs, dental floss, strings of all kinds woven into nests. When building nests birds are attracted to these strings, but man-made strings are too strong, and, thus, deadly. They entangle the chicks' feet while they toddle around in the nest. Adult birds are trapped, as well, while they carry the strings through the twigs and branches during nest construction. In some parks every bluebird nest will have plastic Easter grass because nest building time coincides with Easter.



Photo by Jim Rogers

I monitor bluebird boxes at several parks. Two are suburban regional parks with fishing lakes. Fishing line segments, sometimes with hooks attached, are left on the ground every day. At Easter many people bring Easter baskets with plastic grass and it gets spread all over the lawns. Birds just love to include these 'pretty/useful' materials in their nests. The bluebirds are the lucky ones because I can examine their nests and correct the situation. But other birds build high in the trees and no one can reach them. The following are some of the situations I have witnessed at these two parks. High in a Silk Oak tree a robin is tangled in a long piece of monofilament. It is hanging upside down with wings outstretched. What a gruesome death. A crow suffered the same fate with fishing line at the top of a sycamore. Once I saw something fall out of a tree and a female oriole flew down after it. Her nest fell out of the tree since the monofilament fishing line would not securely attach to the tree. Orioles seem especially at risk from plastic strings. Another oriole nest was created almost entirely of fishing line with some Easter grass and gift ribbon. The father's leg became tangled and he hung upside down unable to get free. Near the top of the nest his two week old chick was caught. In the same park the following year, an oriole nest constructed with fishing line, Easter grass and other plastic strings trapped two chicks. As they struggled to leave the nest it fell out of the tree onto a road and they were run over by a car. One afternoon I was walking by the lake and I noticed a robin thrashing around on the ground. It had chosen a long piece of fishing line that was stuck on something and was getting more and more tangled. I caught it and then asked the group of children watching this drama to go to my nearby car and get the small scissor from my monitoring tool kit. I was able to cut it free. Do fishermen have any idea what the carelessly dropped pieces of monofilament cause? These dangers and tragedies occur frequently but are not seen high in the trees, hidden by the leaves and quite a distance from where the strings were dropped.

Other volunteers with the California Bluebird Recovery Program have many stories to tell about the results of strings in nests. For example, Linda found a bluebird chick hanging from the nest box by a foot tangled in Easter grass. The chick lost the foot and spent a long recovery at a rehabilitation facility. Another monitor, Peter, found a dead chick with a wad of Easter grass down its throat. Dick found a female bluebird dead because she was tangled in the nest she was constructing with Easter grass. Colleen and Kirsten checked a box after the birds fledged but found one more chick inside tethered to the nest with Easter grass. They removed the strings and the bird was able to join his family. Jo-Ann rarely touches a setting bluebird female to count her eggs, but one time she did. She lifted the bird and found two pieces of Easter grass tangled around her legs. She removed the strings and replaced the bird which stayed on her nest as Jo-Ann hung the box back in the tree. Similarly, on checking a nest box Inge and Bill found a female bluebird sitting on her nest, so they did not disturb her to count eggs. When checking the next week she was still there, but something didn't look right so Inge lifted her and found both legs were tangled in Easter grass. They were able to cut her free and found no sores on her legs so they released her. She continued caring for her nest and the chicks were able to fledge. They thought the male must have been feeding her when she was tangled.

Jeff and Lyndsay were running around a fishing lake in Rancho Santa Margarita when they

saw a Canadian Goose limping with fishing line around its leg. They ran to a nearby store and bought nail clippers and lettuce to try and help the bird. The bird was not interested in the lettuce so they went back for bread. After numerous attempts Jeff got the bird to eat bread out of his hand. He then grabbed the goose and held it while Lyndsay cut the fishing line. The leg was swollen due to the line. It was tightly wrapped more than 10 times around the leg. Fortunately for the goose, it had not yet cut in to the flesh and was not infected. The bird walked off, still limping, but was happy to eat bread....from a distance.

At a cemetery I monitor, five of 12 bluebird nests had silver Mylar strings woven throughout. Someone decorated a grave with Mylar thus putting many birds at risk. I was surprised that the shiny strings were so attractive to the birds that they crossed each others territories many times to gather numerous pieces for their nests. It is very tedious and time consuming to remove each string with tweezers and small scissors without destroying the important nest cup shape. I wonder how many other species' nests were dangerously decorated high up in the trees.

People have no idea that these things happen and so are very careless with litter. If they knew the danger most people would pick up every piece. I would encourage all readers to pick up after themselves and to pick up every string left by someone who may not be aware of the danger. The small amount of time it takes to leave the grass free of debris will set a good example for your children to see and for others to follow. Even more important, it will prevent birds from adding dangerous material to their nests. **PICK UP ALL STRINGS, ALWAYS.** Please share the slogan and the information in as many ways as you can. Countless birds will be saved from needless, horrible deaths.

Written by **Susan Bulger**

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## **A NOTE TO LAND MANAGERS**

The Southern California Bluebird Club is working in many ways to keep birds safe during the Spring and Summer nesting season. Tree care presents danger at this critical time. Our Cavity Conservation Initiative is taking a leadership role with West Coast Arborists and over a hundred biology specialists all over the state to create ways to train tree care workers about how to safely do their work while preventing harm to hidden baby birds. Please take a moment to read the short article linked below and consider sending some of your team to the training at the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine, CA. on 9 October 2017. The Sanctuary is home to Sea and Sage Audubon (a supporter of the project), which in conjunction with the Irvine Ranch Water District, the property owner, is generously providing their beautiful Learning Center for the training. Reservations for this date or others can be made by contacting [dawson@simstlc.com](mailto:dawson@simstlc.com) or [scheduler@simstlc.com](mailto:scheduler@simstlc.com).

<http://cavityconservation.com/2017/06/09/wildlife-trained-tree-care-workers-act-as-first-responders-for-baby-hawks/>



Chuck was helping me verify the boxes were hanging securely today and we got dive-bombed by blues! The first warm day and they are already staking out their claims. I was very pleasantly surprised. These seem like repeaters. I had never had such an aggressive male as last year. He dive-bombed me relentlessly each time I went to check or anyone else was near. Generally, the birds get used to us, but not the blue-bomber. Fearless. I saw him fly furiously directly vertically his beak like a sword and run off a squirrel, also crows. So, I think I have the same guy back again. Another observation-Earl had mentioned he thought some bluebirds roost in the boxes in cold weather and I found evidence of that today. As well, I had removed a box from a tree that has been frequented by bluebirds for repair and today hung it back. The gentleman in the unit the tree faces came out asking me where the box had been. He said that he has seen bluebirds searching for it for the last 2 months!. This is evidence that the same birds return. How long do they live?

Fascinating stuff.

**BEVERLY GANDALL**

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### FECAL SACS

We all know that the parents remove fecal sacs from the nests, but where do they put them? Well, I know where papa bird puts mine. I have a ninja line for the kids to play on, sort of like a clothes line. Papa bird takes the fecal sacs to the line and sticks them to the nylon cord. **Chris** in Tustin, CA.



**I see a place for this sac**

The tree trimmers came by and cut off the branch that the nest box was on. So they did me the great favor of hanging it from another branch ... half way to the moon! Even my grandson isn't tall enough. Anybody have a 20 something foot pole? The picnic table behind me is chained to the concrete and can't be moved far enough. I guess I'll get a step ladder and hold it for my grandson.  
**Jerry Millett**

Recently, I checked a nestbox and noticed some large leaves sticking out. I slowly open the door and a huge rat jumped out and past my shoulder. The rat was fat and may have been pregnant. It is hard to believe she could get out of the 1.5 inch hole. As I cleaned out the material, the bluebird pair went after the rat that had invaded their box. **Don Baldwin**

My latest clutch fledged Thursday and Friday but one member is having issues. He fell from a tree into my across the street into a neighbors pond late Saturday afternoon. They fished him out, dried his feathers in late sun and gave him to me. I kept him overnight and reunited him with his parents yesterday in my next-door neighbors backyard which is where most of the fledglings get their wings ready. He hopped around all day, as his parents eorked hard feeding him (rest of the family is resettled a block away) but after sundown, he was still out there and I picked him up and brought him back in for the night. Yes, I am planning on taking him back out there today and leaving him when his folks come to my feeder. I wish I had the time and energy to stay out there and screw off the hawks, crows and cats but it is a work day. Do you have any recommendations? My husband even put him back in the Sycamore tree nesting box yesterday but he floated out within five minutes. **Portia Weiss**

This Mom and the Dad, too, are wearing out trying to keep their 6 lusty, hungry developing young fed. Here is a photo of the Mom with an early carrotwood fruit. I thought the photo might be of interest in the the Bluebirds Fly publication since many are puzzled by the quantity of such seeds they find in BB boxes.

Also, I have several nests with 6 eggs/young though fewer of my BB boxes are inhabited this season, at least, to this point. They seem to be slower in nesting - possibly all that really cold weather as late as March even April?

Of interest as well is the boxes with the eggs and young are in places I have previously been hanging the same boxes for years. **Beverly Gandall**



I monitor three nesting boxes in South Orange County. My backyard box has not been utilized this year, nor was it last year, after a decade of yearly activity. "My" bluebirds are still visiting my birdbath, and periodically check their prior nesting site, so I know they remain in the area. This was puzzling to me until I realized it may have something to do with the mockingbird that has kept us awake at night, this year especially. I did research online and BINGO, I found that mockingbirds do in fact chase off bluebirds and others that they deem intruders into their territory. A frustrating insight, but an answer, nevertheless. And yesterday, while talking to a neighbor down the street, we watched a mockingbird do that very thing, chase a bluebird couple away from its area, in broad daylight! (If anyone knows how to humanely chase away mockingbirds, please let me know! )”

This made me curious about interactions among species; namely, how far apart should nest boxes be placed and which species get along amicably so I did a little research.. I am well aware that House Wrens and House Sparrows are predators and will kill Bluebirds and their eggs but never really thought about species that would prevent Western Bluebirds from building nests in the first place. Following are several pertinent comments I found along with references if you would like to read further:

“Their tree-cavity nest sites are a limited and valuable resource, and Western Bluebirds have to contend with competition from other bluebirds, swallows, nuthatches, some woodpeckers, House Wrens, and European Starlings.”

“Occasionally, problems may also be caused by automobile, bears, bees, bluebirds, blue or scrub jays, chipmunks, cowbirds, crows or ravens, disease or internal parasites, feeding earthworms, flickers, flying squirrels, fox squirrels, grackles, gray squirrels, ground squirrels, hawks, honeybee, human vandals, magpies, mites, opossums, owls, intestinal parasites, skunks, Tree Swallow, violet-green swallows, weasels, west nile virus, window strikes and Yellow Jacket wasps.”

Several excellent references for further reading are:

Predators & Pests of Bluebirds: <http://cbrp.org/SDBbluebirds/pests.htm>

Guide to Predators: <http://www.sialis.org/predatorid.htm>

Bluebird Battles: <http://www.sialis.org/battles.htm>

Competition – Who Trumps Whom? <http://www.sialis.org/competition.htm>

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**Becky Scholten and Dick Blaine**

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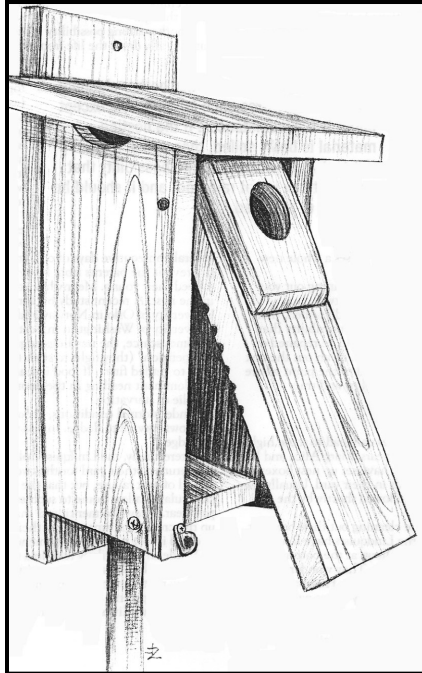
## BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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**Yes, I want to help encourage Bluebirds in California**  
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