



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

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

Bluebirds Brood For Two Years

By Don Yoder • 1995

It has taken two years for this newsletter to hatch. Those great contributors who have helped supply grass for the nest have probably long kissed it goodbye, believing all eggs to be infertile. We hope this new publication will prove their fears unfounded.

We will strive to make future bulletins interesting, helpful, and informative, to appeal to people with various experience levels.

Our goals in starting the California Bluebird Recovery Program are brief: Promote and aid in any way possible the increase in population of native cavity-nesting birds,

bluebirds especially, in California.

This is an organization of and for those who want to promote the welfare of Western Bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds, and other native cavity-nesting birds.

Your ideas for this effort are sought and needed. We will use as many dandy ideas and reports as space permits. We intend this to be an ongoing, self-sustaining enterprise. It perfectly fills a niche in Audubon's "Birds in the Balance" program to "keep common birds common."

We are grateful to Bob Barnes, Audubon's Western Region Coordinator for Birds in the Balance, who has helped guide our fledging.

This article is reprinted from the first issue of the "Bluebirds Fly!" newsletter. Don Yoder was the founder of CBRP.



A Western Bluebird feeds her fledgling. Photo by Sylvia Wright, Nevada County

Knowing Kindness

Nitish Ramani is a sophomore at American High School in Fremont, Calif. Having accompanied his father on bird photography field trips when he was younger, Nitish was excited to pursue an opportunity to volunteer to monitor Western Bluebird nestboxes in Garin Regional Park. Nitish wrote this essay about his experiences.

In the poem “Kindness,” Naomi Shihab Nye explores the theme of kindness and how one has to experience sorrow from loss before they can develop kindness. The poem states that “Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.”

This theme also relates to my life because I had never realized my sensitive side until I started volunteering to help bluebirds. I have realized that I have a compassionate side, learned time management, as well as understood and accepted the realities of life. No change I have experienced in the past year has been more enlightening than involving myself in the bluebird monitoring activity.

Firstly, I have realized the compassionate side in me. I have discovered that there is a lot of satisfaction from helping nature, and that I care a lot for birds. The monitoring visits started as a normal weekly activity, where my dad and I went to the Garin Regional Park in Hayward to monitor and take care of bluebirds and other songbirds.

Once, as I was checking the dozen nestboxes, I saw the light blue colored bluebird eggs and was struck with a wave of joy. When I saw the cute, small, brown hatchlings cuddling together, I became very glad and felt a sense of pride that I helped those hatchlings have a safe nesting environment.

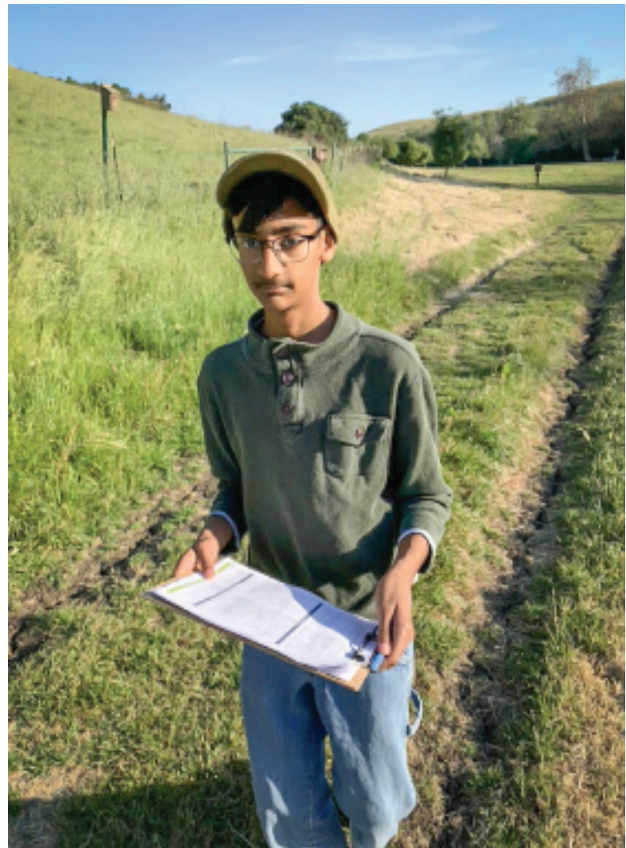


Photo by Rajesh Ramani

I also realized I had a newfound anxiety about their well-being and safety.

I have also learned time management. I have learned to adhere to a schedule, as well as to balance between my school and my volunteer activity. I made a commitment to visit weekly on Fridays so that I would be able to gauge and record the problems the birds faced. I also made the commitment because if I missed a day, there might have been a threat of predators to the birds, and the recorded data would have been inconsistent. I have understood how to prioritize activities during volunteering to make the most of it.

Lastly, I have understood and accepted the realities of life. After I experienced the joy of seeing new hatchlings, I was forced to understand the sadness of seeing some young

ones not make it. I was checking the boxes, seeing the cute hatchlings reacting to their parent's arrival. Then, when I neared the next nestbox, I picked up a pungent smell, which I then realized was the smell of death.

I opened the nestbox for my fears to be confirmed, as one of the hatchlings had died. It was only then, when I saw the dead bird, that I was able to have kindness towards the birds.

This reminded me of the quote, "What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved, all this must go so you

know how desolate the landscape can be between the regions of kindness." Within a few weeks, I was also able to marvel at seeing young ones fledge to fend for themselves.

Surely, I have never experienced a change as enlightening as monitoring to help bluebird recovery. Just as the poem "Kindness" portrays, I have learned that after you experience sorrow, kindness "goes with you everywhere Like a shadow or a friend." I will remember this volunteering experience and all that it has taught me.

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 these web sites:

www.cbrp.org

www.nabluebirdsociety.org

www.socalbluebirds.org

www.sialis.org

If you are looking for a mentor, start by contacting your county coordinator, listed in this newsletter. You can also contact Dick Blaine, dick@theblaines.net, or any board member.

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.

From the Director's Chair

Things are looking up for all of us as more and more people are vaccinated against Covid-19. It is wonderful to be able to meet and hug friends and family, as well as to go out to dinner again. As far as I know, all the trails from previous years are open and being monitored. I expect our totals to return to pre-pandemic levels.

On a personal note, one of my home nest boxes has produced two broods of Western Bluebirds. We have lived here for 53 years, and this is the first year that we have even seen them on our property. My wife and I are delighted to watch their activity from our kitchen window.

Special thanks to Sylvia Wright, photographer *par excellence*, for preparing this newsletter. The layout is both practical and visually pleasing, especially in full color (available on our website). Also, thanks to Jim Semelroth, our previous editor, for the assistance given to Sylvia in getting started. Also, thanks to all of you who contributed articles and photos.

The board has contacted all the California Audubon chapters to offer our support with their cavity nesting programs. Several asked for virtual presentations and these have been done. We are hoping for a closer relationship with the Audubon chapters in the future.

Many thanks to those who made donations to CBRP in 2021, amounting to \$1,695 through June (see the donor list elsewhere in this issue). Your donations cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter. I am reluctant to ask for dues and prefer to encourage donations. If donations decline, we will revert to online newsletters only.

You can easily check your donor status by looking at the mailing label on this newsletter. Following your name are two numbers. The first is the date of your most recent contribution (yyyymm) and the second is the amount (\$\$\$). If these fields are blank or zero, then you have not contributed in the past three years. My practice is to remove names from the contact list after three years with no activity.

Nest box monitors, please enter your data in the CBRP shared data collection spreadsheet by Dec. 1, to give me time to prepare the annual report. Here are the links:

Data entry: bit.ly/3wBzz80

Data entry instructions: cbrp.org/data-collection-end-of-season/

Last, I want to encourage monitors to contribute to and participate in Cornell University's NestWatch Program, using their web site or the bulk upload template. This preserves the nesting data you collect and makes it available to researchers around the world. Also, it is not too late to contribute your data from previous years to NestWatch.

NestWatch web site: www.nestwatch.org/

NestWatch bulk upload documentation: goo.gl/PqHXiX

NestWatch bulk upload template: goo.gl/6eQA9f (send the completed template to me and I will make the arrangements with NestWatch)

Happy 2021 birding and stay well.

-- Dick Blaine, Santa Clara County
dick@theblaines.net

Three Weeks In a Barn Owl Box

The first photo was taken on March 29, 2021, and shows a Barn Owl hen with owlets (eventually five were visible). The second photo was taken on May 11, 2021, and shows the five owlets with no or almost no down. By now the older owlets, or juveniles, look just like their parents.

The last photo was taken May 18, 2021, and shows just a single owlet left in the box that should fledge in days. (Sometimes the fledged juveniles return to the box, so it is difficult to say when they first left the box.)

Over the next four weeks, the adults will teach the juveniles what is food and how to hunt. After that, the juveniles will disperse and be on their own.

The average life of a Barn Owl is 1.5 years, or one mating season. Starvation is the No. 1 killer of Barn Owls. Master Bander Steve Simmons once recaptured a hen that he had banded 10 years earlier. It is the good hunters that survive the longest.

-- Story and photos by **Lee Pauser**
Santa Clara County

More information about Barn Owls is on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "All About Birds" website:
www.allaboutbirds.org



The WEBL Architects of Silicon Valley

At the Sequoias Retirement Community in Portola Valley, Tricia Jordan and I observed that Western Bluebirds indeed have innate engineering skills. One of our nest box poles leans. Every year we push it upright and wedge it in place. This year, not only did the pole lean over again, but also a WEBL built a complete nest inside. Not put off by the floor angle, she carefully constructed her nest parallel to the ground. No eggs or nestlings could roll out of that nest! (We are quite sure predators cannot get to the entrance as there are no trees overhead.) Considering that these parents were born and bred here in Silicon Valley, it is no surprise that they have great engineering skills. We left the pole alone.

-- Story and photo by **Cindy Lockhart**, San Mateo County

New CBRP Opportunity: Monitor Birds on a Wild Farm

As dedicated bird box monitors, we put up bird boxes, check and maintain them, and record our findings. We monitor in many ecosystems including parks, open space preserves, golf courses and our own backyards; we do this for many reasons including our love of nature, birds and their future, and just being outdoors.

Through a new collaboration with Wild Farm Alliance, we have one more ecosystem – produce farms and vineyards – giving us another great reason to monitor: helping farmers reap bird's pest control services!

Wild Farm Alliance (WFA) is a nonprofit based in Watsonville. For the past two decades, they have promoted healthy viable agriculture that helps to protect and restore wild nature. They encourage and support farmers to grow organically by offering education, encouraging the planting of hedgerows, and installing bird boxes. They currently have 34 produce farms and vineyards and 158 boxes in their Songbird Farm Trail.

These boxes are typically monitored only at the end of the season. Here's where California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) monitors have a great opportunity to use our knowledge and passion to provide weekly monitoring, giving the farmer and WFA more data on fledge success.

This year, in collaboration with WFA, I started monitoring 46 boxes at the Monte Bello Vine-

yard at Ridge Winery. Ridge is committed to sustainability and farming their vineyards organically and is the largest grower of organically certified grapes in Sonoma County and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Ridge views sustainability as “both a philosophy and a set of environmentally responsible practices designed to safeguard the land on which we grow our grapes. We seek to conserve and renew natural resources, protect wildlife habitats, and ensure the safety and economic security of our employees.” They use natural methods for maintaining soil health and controlling vine pests, diseases, weeds and mildew.

One of the methods they use to control vine pests is encouraging insect-eating birds on the property by installing bird boxes. By monitoring their boxes this year, I have had the joy of seeing and learning about these practices in addition to monitoring very productive bird boxes.

These new trails not only increase cavity nesting bird population but also help farmers decrease the use of pesticides. We invite you to join us in helping farmers use avian pest control.

Please contact us when you're ready to monitor boxes on produce farms or vineyards and we'll help you start monitoring existing boxes on produce farms/vineyards in your area or help you introduce the concept to farmers in your area.

-- Story by **Patricia Jordan**
Santa Clara County

-- Photo of Western Bluebird by **Sylvia Wright**
Nevada County

More information: Wild Farm Alliance's website is <https://www.wildfarmalliance.org>.



You've Never Seen It All

My good friend Steve Simmons, who monitored nest boxes for 58 years, said, "You've never seen it all." If he were still with us, I'd delight in showing him this photo.

The photo is of a Violet-green Swallow in a nest box with five Western Bluebird nestlings.

The Violet-green Swallows have returned after migrating and are looking for cavities to nest in. The swallows won't harm the nestlings, and there are reports of swallows actually assisting in feeding the nestlings.

Violet-green Swallows and Ash-throated Flycatchers are the late nesters and often have to use whatever cavities are available. I've been finding both Tree and Violet-green Swallow nest starts in boxes from which other species have fledged and before I had a chance to clean out the used nest. This is another example of



the competition that occurs among birds for nest cavities. I added another nest box nearby in hopes that the swallows will use it.

-- Story and photo by **Lee Pauser**
Santa Clara County

Giving Credit Where It's (Over) Due



In the Winter 2020-21 issue, we published this photo without giving proper credit. The photographer is **Kathy Aldrich of Sonoma and Tuolumne counties**.

Kathy wrote: "This photo was taken by a wildlife camera with a motion sensor. The bird bath is used largely by Western Bluebirds, but we had some Cedar Waxwings join them for a few days. As many as a dozen bluebirds will use the bird bath at one time."



Field Notes: The Horse Park at Woodside

There are 23 boxes at The Horse Park at Woodside, and this has been a great year. Twenty of the boxes are along the perimeter fence of the property and three are in trees.

In other years, there have been birds other than bluebirds in the boxes, but this year it is all bluebirds. They started early this year and the box with seven – yes, seven -- chicks was the first box to nest.

It is often hard to see in the boxes, so I usually stick my phone in the box opening and take a photo to really “see” what is going on. Sometimes it is actually surprising. As you can see, we have every stage of development, and it is all fun.

-- Story and photos by Nancy V. Powell, San Mateo County



Field Notes: Beck Boxes in Santa Clara County

Well, not the usual year, but at least some interesting activity.

I have 4 small boxes.

Box #1 was taken over by wasps. I cleaned them out every week, but by the time they gave up, there was no longer avian interest.

Box #2 is a roost for a Nuttall Woodpecker.

Box #3 was very busy with "applicants." I had two pairs of Western Bluebirds (first year for Bluebirds in this yard), a pair of Chickadees, and a pair of Oak Titmice competing. Then a stealthy Bewick's Wren filled the box 25% with nesting material but ultimately didn't use it.

Box #4 also had lot of interest, but a pair of House Finches build a nest too nearby and the box itself remained unused. Little did I know that when I hung a welcome wreath with a bird motif, birds would actually build a nest in it. If you look closely at the photo, you will see grass hanging out of the decoration. The House Finch parents just fledged three chicks. It must have been very cozy.

As we head toward summer, in the yard we have woodpeckers, wrens, flycatchers, hummingbirds, House Finches (both red and orange forms), titmice and Chestnut-backed Chickadees. There are Lesser Goldfinches, White-crowned Sparrows, Mourning Doves, California and Spotted Towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos, Black Phoebes, Northern Flicker, a White-breasted Nuthatch group with fledglings, and the obligatory Northern Mockingbird and California Scrub-Jay.

Those are my "regulars," and we get visitors, too. The pandemic work-from-home has allowed good viewing and my yard is always busy.

- Story and photo by **Patricia Beck, Santa Clara County**



Q&A: Jennifer Bauer, Eagle Scout Candidate

Jennifer Bauer is an Eagle Scout candidate improving nest boxes in Briones East Bay Regional Park in Lafayette. She talked with Georgette Howington, CBRP coordinator for Contra Costa County.

Please tell us about yourself.

I go to Acalanes High School. My troop is 200G (the “g” stands for girl!). In the boy part of Troop 200, there are about 60 scouts, and in my unit of Troop 200, there are only about 7 girls.

Why did you choose the nest box program for your Eagle project?

I was lucky that Eric Fromer offered this opportunity on his nest box trail for an Eagle

project, and I went for it! I enjoy learning about nature and environmental science, and I am always down for a fun hike in Briones.

What is the scope of your project?

My plan is to build four bird boxes. Two of them will be replacing some old ones already built and the other two will be placed in different locations confirmed through permits made with PG&E and East Bay Regional Parks District.

I will be building the bird boxes ahead of time at home and, with the help of some fellow scouts, we will hike the materials and tools up to the sites!

How do you become an Eagle Scout?

You need to complete 21 merit badges and advance through many ranks, which takes several years. Before starting the Eagle project, the proposal must be accepted by the troop’s Unit Leader and Commissioner, the Council or District Leader, and the project’s Beneficiary.

After the project is complete, if it passes an extensive review process, the Eagle rank is achieved.

What do you expect to learn?

I have already learned a lot about organizing a project and plan. Having to communicate with people I have never met before, and completing the step-by-step process, is a challenging and daunting task. I have, however, met many helpful people who are incredibly generous with their work and time, and it inspires me to do the same when I grow up.

How long will this project take?

Planning began in late March, and we hope to finish it in the next month!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Donors

2021 Donations through June -- \$1,695

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California Bluebird Recovery Program County Coordinators

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Los Angeles	<i>See the Southern California Bluebird Club Website for support: socalbluebirds.org</i>		
Madera	Bill Ralph	209-966-2260	Bill@dryadranch.com
Mendocino	Michael & Marybeth Arago	707-962-0724	mbarago@mcn.org
Merced	Bill Ralph	209-966-2260	Bill@dryadranch.com
Nevada	Kate Brennan	530-268-1682	Katebrennan6699@gmail.com
Orange	<i>See the Southern California Bluebird Club Website for support: socalbluebirds.org</i>		
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*For the encouragement and
preservation of cavity nesters
– especially bluebirds –
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California Bluebird Recovery Program

A non-profit project of:
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National Audubon Society – California • Mount Diablo Audubon Society

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