



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

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

Overall Results for 2021 Nesting Season

By Dick Blaine, Program Director

Results for 2021 were about back to pre-pandemic times, although some trails were still closed. The top producers and counties were similar to previous years.

Reports were received from 26 counties, 155 monitors (127 in 2020) and 275 trails (233). 4,951 (4,219) boxes were installed on the reported trails and yielded 16,323 (16,223) fledglings, of which 9,857 (8,994) were Western Bluebirds.

The remaining 6,466 (7,229) were distributed among 19 other cavity-nesting species.

Orange County, as usual, was the top-producing county (by more than a factor of two) for the number of trails, nest tries, total fledglings and Western Bluebird fledglings. The top 10 counties for fledglings were:

	<u>All species</u>	<u>WEBL</u>
Orange	6,017	4,428
Santa Clara	2,670	1,154
Los Angeles	1,124	1,082
Alameda	960	689
Contra Costa	917	640
Yolo	618	304
Nevada	511	344
Merced	497	82
Madera	469	79
San Mateo	428	250

The 10 top-producing trail monitors (all species, Western Bluebird) were:

David McMichael (Orange, Riverside & San Bernardino) – 1,894, 123
Lee Pauser (Santa Clara) – 1,313, 519
Bill Ralph (Madera & Mariposa) – 966, 161
Irv Tiessen (Alameda) – 917, 664
Hanika Cook (Solano & Yolo) – 733, 306
Jerry Millett (Los Angeles) – 457, 452
Susan Bulger (Los Angeles & Orange) – 451, 451
Valerie Sinex (Orange) – 365, 365
Jim & Connie Rogers (Santa Clara) – 349, 141
John Venhuizen (Orange) – 328, 328

CBRP has been collecting data since 1996 (see *table on Page 2*). From 1996 through 2006, trail-by-trail data were collected from handwritten worksheets, summarized by county coordinators and entered into a statewide spreadsheet. From 2007 through 2011, box-by-box and trail-by-trail data were entered by monitors directly into a homegrown database. For the past 10 years, trail-by-trail data have been entered by monitors directly into a shared, online spreadsheet.

If you are a monitor willing to report additional detail on individual boxes, I strongly encourage you to participate in Cornell University's eBird and/or NestWatch programs. Data on the NestWatch site is of great scientific value and provides information for researchers worldwide. You'll find these tools on the CBRP website:

Instructions: goo.gl/yP9ZBV

Spreadsheet: goo.gl/6eQA9f

California Bluebird Recovery Program 1996-2021 (All Species)

	1996	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Average*
Counties	21	33	25	24	24	21	20	20	24	24	26	24
Reporters	169	178	148	192	160	178	169	172	170	127	155	165
Species	16	20	19	23	20	21	20	19	19	19	20	20
Boxes (N)	2400	4167	5139	5274	5601	5793	5333	5358	5397	4218	4951	4876
Tries (T)	1526	3783	4177	3939	5526	5742	6007	6291	6826	4770	5371	4905
T/N	0.6	0.9	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.0
Eggs (E)		20315	22879	28751	26262	27509	27395	27097	29012	21491	23767	25448
E/N		5.5	4.5	5.5	4.7	4.7	5.1	5.1	5.4	5.1	4.8	5.2
E/T		6.1	4.5	7.3	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.4	5.2
Chicks (H)		17204	18414	23014	21234	22872	22998	22840	24624	18122	19895	21122
H/N		4.1	3.5	4.4	3.8	3.9	4.3	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.0	4.3
H/T		4.5	4.3	5.8	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.7	4.3
H/E		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Fledged (F)	5077	15703	17888	20737	18144	19873	20246	19731	21164	16223	16323	17374
F/N	2.1	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.2	3.4	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.3	3.6
F/T	3.3	4.2	4.3	5.3	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.0	3.5
F/E		0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7
F/H		0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8

*Average of non-zero values for 26 years

2020 Note: Results were about 20% less than previous years as Covid-19 pandemic resulted in closure of many trails

2021 Note: Results were close to pre-pandemic values – some trails were still closed

To see all 26 years of results: www.cbrp.org/results/

To see 2021 results by trail and species: www.cbrp.org/annual-reports/

Introducing A New Species

I have been a Bluebirder in Southern California for over 20 years and have managed trails in North Orange County and have migrated to Diamond Bar, Chino Hills and even Phillips Ranch.

Over the years I have seen many species of birds that reside locally, but the ones I am most familiar with are those cavity nesters that build nests in nest boxes that we build and emplace in trees throughout. A list of those that have taken residence in my trails are – in alphabetical order, of course – Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bewick's Wren, House Sparrow, House Wren, Tree Swallow, and Western Bluebird.

David Allen Sibley – the source I use to identify birds locally – in his 2003 “Field Guide to Birds of Western North America” covers 703 species of birds plus other regional forms. He also recognizes subspecies that are named by the geographic region in which they breed.

Allow me to introduce a new name to the bird world that has come to my attention in the lattice-work outside my front door. Why there, you might ask? Because that is the location of my WEBL nest box that was successful this year with two clutches of five fledglings each.

As to the proud WEBL parents, they have been dedicated and stalwart in defending their home against threats – particularly against the DASPs. You haven't heard about this bird? As explained above, according to Mr. Sibley, it probably qualifies as a subspecies, and so be it. For the record, the DASP is named DAMn SParrow – sorry for the curse word.

It just so happens that there is a large carrot-wood tree in my parkway, and every year it becomes the local meeting place for these obnoxious little undocumented alien birds. They also congregate in the large camellia bush in front of a bedroom window, which allows them close access to the nest box. In general, small flocks of DASPs seem to think this is their home – despite my frequent spraying the bushes with a stream of cold water. More to this story next year.

– Bob Franz, Orange County

Lucky 13 Years In Orange County

I've just completed my 13th year as a monitor with excellent results. I (finally!) did some research and calculations to see what my Brea Country Hills Trail's historical stats are.

I remember that, at the beginning of this year, some members commented that theirs were getting off to a slow start. My average first observed egg(s) over 13 years is April 4. This year my first egg was April 7, so not statistically significantly late.

I am also happy to report a bumper crop of

WEBL fledglings. My average fledgling count per nest try was 4.3 this year, which happily is my highest ever. The lowest was 2.4 per try in 2018. The mode, or most frequent, fledglings per box is 2.7, which has happened four times. My trail is averaging 3.2 fledglings per nest try over 13 years. I am curious if other monitors report similar results.

I had a pair of overachievers this year, too. They successfully fledged all six of the eggs laid in their first brood and all seven of their second! I suspect last year's pair returned to the same box. Last year that box yielded 6 out of 6 and 5 out of 7.

— Amy Kernes, Orange County

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 websites:

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 and a donation button on the main page of our website. Your contribution is tax-deductible and goes a long way in helping us conserve the bluebird population in California.

From the Director's Chair



CBRP has had several major accomplishments this year. Tricia Jordan continues to improve our website. Our wonderful editor, Sylvia Wright, redesigned our newsletter. We contacted all the California Audubon chapters to offer our

support with their cavity-nesting programs. Several Audubon Chapters took us up on our offer, and Mike Azevedo and Georgette Howington held training sessions for each. We added several County Coordinators and are very active in training new nestbox monitors.

A major project that started in fall 2021 and will continue into the 2022 nesting season is training new monitors. With the help and support of California Audubon, we will begin online training of 150 people in January. Georgette and Mike are creating entirely new training material including text, images and videos (see screenshot at right).

They will present three to four Zoom training sessions, each consisting of two one-hour segments. Hopefully this will provide information to the new monitors to start or take over trails. All this training material will become available on our website.

Thanks to all who entered your 2021 results online. We used Google Drive again for shared data collection with few problems.

All issues of our annual reports and newsletters are available in full color for viewing and downloading on our web site.

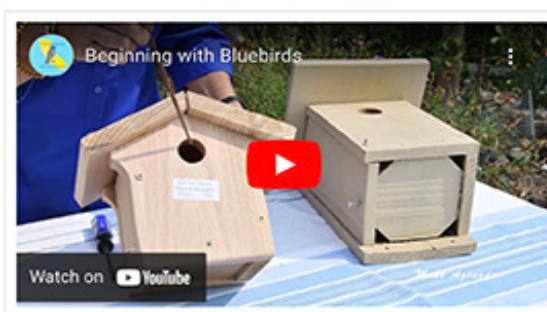
www.cbrp.org/annual-reports/
www.cbrp.org/newsletters/

Several articles summarizing the 2021 results are in this issue of Bluebirds Fly! More details are on the website; go to www.cbrp.org and click on the "Results" tab.

Special thanks to those of you who made donations to CBRP in 2021 – \$1,606 in July-December and \$2,316 for the year (see Page 12).

I want to encourage monitors to contribute to and participate in Cornell University's NestWatch Program to preserve the nesting data you collect and to make that data available to researchers around the world. It is not too late to contribute your data to NestWatch. There are two tools for you to use: the NestWatch website or the CBRP bulk upload template.

Mike Azevedo, CBRP Santa Clara Coordinator, helps get you started monitoring Birdboxes



NestWatch website: www.nestwatch.org
Bulk upload documentation: goo.gl/PqHXiX

Bulk upload template: goo.gl/6eQA9f (send the completed template to me and I will send your data to NestWatch.)

Remember to get ready for the 2022 nesting season by cleaning and repairing your nest boxes by the end of February. Hopefully you will be able to access all your trails. Happy New Year, Happy 2022 birding and stay well.

-- Dick Blaine, Santa Clara County

History of Bluebirds and CBRP

By Bob Franz • Part 1 of 2

Conservation efforts in California have been successful in restoring once-threatened populations of Western Bluebirds (WEBLs). Their story starts with some early history of bluebirds in general and moves forward to show this success in terms of numbers of nestboxes monitored and WEBL fledges.

Early History

Bluebird species have been around for millions of years. The bird family to which bluebirds belong, the thrush family, is traced to the Pliocene Epoch, from two million to seven million years ago.

There is fossil evidence, however, for only two out of the three species, Eastern and Western Bluebirds. No such evidence for the Mountain Bluebird species has yet been discovered. Fossil remains attributed to Western Bluebirds, dating from the Pleistocene period (2 million to 10,000 years ago) have been found in Carpinteria, Calif.

Bluebirds are included in the bird family Turridae, the thrushes. This family, sometimes called the true thrushes, has about 175 species worldwide, North America having 18 as breeding species or regular visitors.

Early Bluebird Activity in the U.S.

The following is from “A Draft History of Bluebirds and Bluebirding” by Elizabeth Zimmerman Smith (copyright 2022, www.sialis.org).

1750-1800 – The population of farmers needing land exploded. During this time, most people raised their own food. Forests were converted into pasture, and fruit trees were planted. Home sites with open areas created ideal bluebird foraging habitat. Bluebirds may also have nested or roosted in recesses in log cabins and farm buildings.

Some early farmers used machines called

binders to tie bundles of grain stalks together with twine. A large box that had a top/roof and holes on either side containing the twine was attached to the side of the binder, and these boxes were often used as nest sites by bluebirds (see Sialis.org photo below).



In 1827, William Swainson created a new genus for bluebirds – *Sialia* (pronounced Cee-AL-ee-a).

In the 1830s, to establish wildlife familiar to European immigrants, or to control insect infestations, they decided to import House Sparrows (HOSP).

Accounts differ, but it appears that repeated introductions occurred in various parts of the U.S. over a 25-year period. Initially, eight pairs of HOSPs were released in Brooklyn, N.Y., in either 1850 or 1851 by Nicholas Pike, director of the Brooklyn Institute. In 1851, Pike collected more HOSPs from Liverpool, England, and released 50 in 1852, while he bred another 50 in Green Wood Cemetery, which were released at the cemetery in 1853.

In 1854 and 1858, HOSPs were introduced to Portland, Maine. During the next decade, HOSPs were introduced to eight other cities, including release of 1,000 HOSPs in Philadelphia by city officials. By 1870 they were established as far south as Columbia, S.C., and Galveston, Texas; as far west as Davenport, Iowa, and as far north as Montreal, Canada. By 1887, some states had already initiated efforts begun to eradicate HOSPs. So basically, less than 200 years ago, there were no HOSPs in North America, and now they are the most abundant songbird on the continent,

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with an estimated 150 million established in all 48 contiguous states.

North American Bluebird Society

The following is from “A History of the North American Bluebird Society” by Mary Dougherty Janetatos (copyright 2021, www.nabluebirdociety.org).

Since the publication of Larry Zeleny’s article “Song of Hope for the Bluebirds” in the June 1977 issue of National Geographic Magazine was pending, the time seemed ripe for the major conservation magazines, i.e. National Audubon Society (NAS) and National Wildlife Federation, to get in high gear regarding bluebirds. Three meetings for bluebird enthusiasts were scheduled. At the end of the third meeting, founding officers and board of directors were selected and Larry Zeleny officially became the founder of the newly formed North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Its office would be in Silver Spring, Md., in the home of the founding executive director, Mary Janetatos. The official date of incorporation was March 29, 1978.

Early Bluebird Activity in California

The following is from two pages referencing the Nov-Dec 1915 issue of the magazine “Condor” (Vol. 17, No. 6). One page appears to be a copy of Page 235 of “Condor,” and it references a WEBL meeting in Los Angeles.

“In 1892, a pair of bluebirds persisted in trying to nest in a mailbox on the corner of Solano Avenue and Buena Vista Street in Los Angeles – now called North Broadway. The birds considered the mailbox a wholly suitable place, but the mailman and the owner objected. In spite of the discouragements, several eggs were laid before the bluebirds gave up the site. – W. Lee Chambers, Eagle Rock, Calif.”

In 1966, a breeding survey showed a decrease in bluebirds of 23 percent, and concerned citizens started building and replacing nestboxes on trails that immediately resulted in an increase in their numbers.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

The California Bluebird Recovery Program, CBRP, was founded in 1994 by Donald E.



Yoder, who lived in Walnut Creek. It is supported by National Audubon Society-California and affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society.

Don Yoder described his aims for the CBRP in a letter to bluebird enthusiasts:

- Enlist current bluebirders and recruit others who will help re-establish bluebirds in their normal habitat.
- Find typical habitat for the placement of nestboxes suitable for use by 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 operators can exchange information and secure help in solving problems encountered in the field.

CBRP Newsletter History & Excerpts

Summer 1995: The first CBRP newsletter (officially Vol. 1, No. 1) was produced by a team consisting of Don Yoder as program director and staff writer, Bob Barnes as program coordinator and newsletter editor, and Sheila

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Green as production staff advisor, and included this information:

- Bob and Betty Potts in Madera County had success for 13 years prior to 1981 with 10 nestboxes made from downed oak tree branches.
- Leonard Cox of Mill Creek Canyon in San Bernardino County had been maintaining 19 bluebird nestboxes since 1980.
- Doug Martin of Sylmar, Los Angeles County, placed 18 nestboxes in a nearby park in January of 1992. Sixteen were active.

March 1997: Dick Purvis of Orange County led all reporters with 1,111 fledges, of which 1,011 were bluebirds. He also reported 237 Wood Duck fledges. Dick had 334 bluebird boxes hanging from trees in cemeteries, parks and golf courses.

On May 15-18, the Orange County Sea & Sage chapter of the Audubon Society sponsored the 20th annual meeting of the North American Bluebird Society in Newport Beach. Programs included:

- Field trips to Santiago Regional Park, Newport Beach and pier featuring oceanic and shore birds.
- The evening program featured Dick Purvis speaking and presenting slides on urban bluebird trails.
- Sunday's field trip to the Bolsa Chica Marsh promised to see nesting Least, Elegant and Royal Terns, Black Skimmers, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Clapper Rails and Belding and Savannah Sparrows.

June 1997: Dick Purvis' field trip and presentation at the 20th NABS Annual meeting were a hit, exciting bluebirders from as far away as New York and Saskatchewan.

Program director Don Yoder received one of

five 1997 Bluebird Conservation Awards from NABS President Charlotte Jernigan. Don had been active in cavity nester conservation since 1971 – that's 26 years! Since retirement in 1984, Don expanded his trail from the six boxes he originally put up on the local golf course to 105 boxes. He's built at least 100 more boxes to give to others. Don was elected to the Board of Directors of NABS in 1992.

Newsletter Editors

As publishing the newsletter is a volunteer effort, it is time to acknowledge the editors:

- Sheila Green – Vol. 2, Nos. 1 and 2, 1996
- Hatch and Judy Graham – 1997 thru 2003
- Patsy Kahl – 2004 thru 2006
- Michael Spohn – Fall 2007, Spring 2008
- Jim Semelroth – Winter 2008/9 thru Winter 2020/21
- Sylvia Wright – Summer 2021 to present

Dick Blaine Takes the Helm

Don Yoder remained program director until he retired in 2006. He was succeeded by Dick Blaine of Cupertino. Dick still leads the CBRP in achieving Yoder's goals, including publishing the "Bluebirds Fly!" newsletter. Under Dick's leadership, the CBRP has seen the following significant increases in:

- Reporters: from 152 in 2006 to 178 in 2016
- Nestboxes: from 3,942 in 2006 to 5,793 in 2015
- Fledglings: from 17,330 in 2006 to 21,164 in 2019

CBRP Annual Report

Since the "hatching" of the CBRP in 1994 by Don Yoder, and the continuation of leadership by Dick Blaine, the CBRP's Annual Reports have provided a good measure of the success of the CBRP in helping WEBLs and

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Growing Our Community in 2021

By Georgette Howington
Alameda & Contra Costa Counties Coordinator

We want to thank each nest box monitor for your time, commitment and data in 2021. Despite the many challenges you may have faced due to the pandemic, you continued to monitor and take care of your trails, whether 2 boxes or 200! We must give YOU the credit for making this program as effective as it has been. Our average data for 25 years is over 16,000 fledges annually. Because of this level of success, we decided it was time to reach out to each of the 49 Audubon Society chapters and offer our support by helping them start their own nest box trails.

Some of the Chapters already have their own programs and report their data to us. Six more expressed an interest in learning more about the California Bluebird Recovery Program. A few asked us for personalized presentations, and one invited us to participate in a community event. We were encouraged, and while it is going to take time, we do feel that we will have more participation from Audubon chapters in the future.

The other development was Audubon California contacted us to ask if they could help us grow the program. This was significant. And of course, we said, "YES!" We wrote an article for the Audubon California website blog that highlighted a baby bird rescue

saving nine orphaned nestlings. The article was also posted on their Facebook page. At the end of the article, we offered interested readers a chance to learn more about the nest box program and become monitors. We began planning to offer classes in January and February.

Tricia Jordan, the CBRP board member who developed and designed the new website,

also created a sign-up form for anyone interested. And we immediately started getting sign-ups. By the time this is published, we will have about 150 people who will be taking the classes!

If you missed the opportunity to sign up, or know someone who might want to take the classes, please have them visit the website at CBRP.org to watch a recording of the class. You can also

send us your questions via email at info@CBRP.org.

The other important piece of this is that we have posted lots of helpful information for new monitors, as well as expanded resources for experienced monitors, on the website.

As we step forward into 2022, we are confident you will continue to be part of this community of bluebirders, and we will do what we can to provide you with more support. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions, concerns and suggestions. Your feedback is important. Thank you again for the time and dedication you gave the nest box program in 2021 and in all the years past! Bluebird blessings for a Happy New Year.



Georgette Howington

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other cavity-nesting birds thrive under the assault of human obstacles and nature's uncertainties. The chart below provides dramatic evidence of the success of Don Yoder, Dick Blaine and the dedication of all of the many CBRP volunteers from 1996 to 2020.

	1996	2020
Volunteers reporting	169	181
Counties represented	21	25
Nestboxes	2,400	4,593
Tries (nest with 1 or more eggs)	1,526	4,263
Fledges (species list below)	5,077	16,223

Species Reported

These cavity-nesters are granted the same protections and care as bluebirds. Species reported in the CBRP Annual Report:

Acorn Woodpecker	American Kestrel	Ash-throated Flycatcher
Barn Owl	Bewick's Wren	Black Phoebe
Black-capped Chickadee	Burrowing Owl (does not nest in boxes)	Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Downy Woodpecker	European Starling	House Finch
House Sparrow	House Wren	Mountain Bluebird
Mountain Chickadee	Northern Flicker	Nuttall's Woodpecker
Oak Titmouse	Tree Swallow	Violet-green Swallow
Western Bluebird	Western Screech Owl	White-breasted Nuthatch

Most Active Reporters

Names and number of boxes monitored each year:

1999 – Dick Purvis OC – 403, Steve Simmons ME – 220
 2000 – Steve Simmons ME – 402, Dick Purvis OC – 231
 2001 – Steve Simmons ME – 402, Dick Purvis OC – 335

2002 – Steve Simmons ME – 408, Dick Purvis OC – 308
 2003 – Dick Purvis OC – 403, Walter Carnahan NE – 268
 2004 – Steve Simmons ME – 1,100, Dick Purvis OC – 274
 2005 – Steve Simmons ME – 1,003, Dick Purvis OC – 343
 2006 – Steve Simmons ME – 474, Dick Purvis OC – 383
 2007 – Steve Simmons ME – 688, Dick Purvis OC – 373
 2008 – Dick Purvis OC – 365, Irvin Tiessen AL – 259
 2009 – Dick Purvis OC – 407, Irvin Tiessen AL – 259
 2010 – Steve Simmons ME – 772, Dick Purvis OC – 323
 2011 – Steve Simmons ME – 723, Dick Purvis OC – 400
 2012 – Dick Purvis OC – 398, Lee Pauser SC – 354
 2013 – Steve Simmons ME – 588, Lee Pauser SC – 410
 2014 – Lee Pauser SC – 436, Dick Purvis OC – 330
 2015 – Lee Pauser SC – 434, Steve Simmons ME – 355
 2016 – Lee Pauser SC – 515, Steve Simmons ME – 367
 2017 – Lee Pauser SC – 510, Steve Simmons ME – 351
 2018 – Lee Pauser SC – 494, Steve Simmons ME – 372
 2019 – Lee Pauser SC – 443, Irvin Tiessen AL – 270
 2020 – Lee Pauser SC – 462, Irvin Tiessen AL – 312
 2021 – David McMichael (OC, R, SB) – 610

Lee Pauser (SC) – 471

County abbreviations

AL – Alameda R – Riverside
 ME – Merced SB – San Bernardino
 NE – Nevada SC – Santa Clara
 OC – Orange

Program Directors' Trails

In addition to providing overall leadership for the CBRP, the program directors also monitor nestboxes.

Year	Don Yoder	Dick Blaine
1999	94	
2000	78	
2001	92	
2002	78	
2003	93	22
2004	83	22
2005	81	30
2006		32
2007		24
2008		43
2009, 2010, 2011		45
2012		6
2013, 2014		4
2015		6
2016		6
2017		26
2018		10
2019, 2020		9
2021		6

Look for Part 2 of this 'History of Bluebirds and CBRP' in the Summer 2022 issue

Two Species, One Winner

Here is something I hadn't seen before. A box with five Western Bluebird eggs became a box with one (possibly more that I didn't see) pecked egg. I suspected House Wren as there is a territorial one in that area.

But the next week all the bluebird eggs were gone and a Violet-green Swallow had moved in. On the next check, one bluebird egg was found with four warm VGS eggs. Next week, a second bluebird egg had been added. The bluebird eggs never hatched, but three out of four VGS hatchlings fledged.

I wonder why only the VGS eggs hatched?

– Story and photos by **Joan Loney,**
Santa Clara County



Pinkies in a Wood Duck Box

Most nest-box monitors would have problems identifying these two hatchlings (*photo at right*).

Fortunately, we saw the mama Northern Flicker leave the box as we approached.

Only one of the two fledged, and the other eggs failed to hatch.

– Story and photo
by **Bill Ralph,**
Madera County



No Rain, No Bugs, No Bluebirds

2021 was the worst year since I started monitoring in 1996. It was very hot, and there was not enough rain on my ranch to allow even the hardiest of weeds or grasses to grow! There were no insects – hence no food for insect-eating birds. One nest had two eggs. Then the birds built another nest on top with four eggs and then built another nest on top of that with one egg and then built another nest and abandoned the box! Of the four other boxes that had bluebirds, only one had any luck (two fledged). In the other three boxes, all 11 hatchlings died.

– **Dick Kempton, Ventura County**

A Bluebird Nesting Season Full of Firsts

**Story and watercolor art
by Marilyn Petch, Contra Costa County**

We had a year of many firsts with our Bluebird nesting box, placed under our porch eave, four feet from the kitchen window. This year's adult Bluebird pair had two consecutive broods, a first for our box. (One year we had two broods, but from different mated pairs.) Nesting for the first brood this year began earlier than usual, March 15. Fledging of four took place on May 5. The second nesting took place when the fledglings from the first brood were 10 days old, and the second brood fledging of five was July 4 (two independence day celebrations – Cinco de Mayo and Fourth of July).

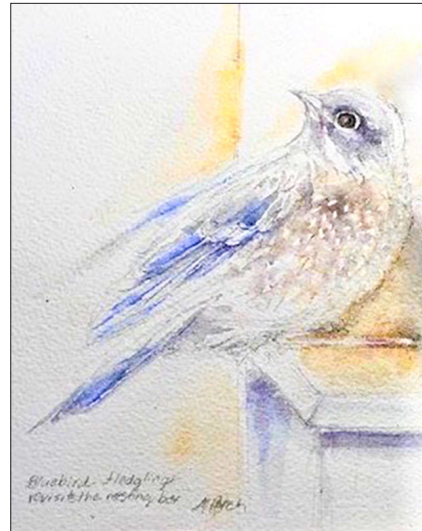
Another first is that we have continued to see the Bluebirds and surviving young adults from the two broods every day. In the past, they seemed to relocate after fledging took place, and we had only occasional sightings.

We have a wonderful neighbor and photographer, Bob, who is a co-guardian of our nesting box with me. A single-car driveway separates our one-story 1920's houses. Our nesting observations and photos are mostly taken from inside our homes. Our neighbor's dining room looks out towards our nesting box.

This year, Bob added a solar powered fountain feature to his front yard bird bath and it has attracted many varieties of birds. We watched the Bluebird parents introduce each of their broods to the "spa" when they were one week past fledging. Both Bluebird parents watched vigilantly from the telephone wires between our two houses, and would swoop down at any perceived threat.

When the parents began the second nesting, the first-brood fledglings gathered on top of the nesting box, curiously looking down

towards the box entrance. They also sought comfort up on the top of the box when it was windy, and would crowd (and sometimes scuffle) up there. I think the most magical first this year was watching two female juveniles from the first brood assist with the feeding and fledging of the second brood, a few days



before the nestlings fledged. It took the juvenile helpers a few tries to understand that they were supposed to deliver the insects to the loudly chirping nestlings presenting

at the box entrance with open beaks. On fledging day of the second brood, I captured on my iPhone one of the female juveniles approaching the box with an empty beak, and then repeatedly flying off, an act that ultimately lead to a nestling taking flight from the nesting box.

This year, we have also witnessed the Bluebird fledglings flocking and roosting with House Finch fledglings of about the same age. For the first few months after the first brood of Bluebirds fledged, a single House Finch was always seen with Bluebirds – on the telephone wires, at the bird bath... They still all seem to roost some nights in a tree across the street, along with Towhees. That said, the adult Bluebirds are very assertive with the House Finches and Sparrows when it comes to the nesting box and even when it comes to perching position on the telephone wires.

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2021 Nesting Season Was Full of Firsts

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Also a first this year: The male Bluebird parent visits the nesting box virtually every day with the now young-adult Bluebirds (usually late afternoon) after they visit the spa. He goes in and out of the box for a short inspection. The young adults peek inside as well. I have also seen the female Bluebird parent going into the box on occasion.

As in the past, the Bluebirds are at times interactive with us. During nesting season, they have observed me chasing away crows that sometimes perch up on the telephone pole with full view of the nesting box. I have on occasion heard the Bluebird parents' distress chirping sounds, and I have responded by chasing away threats – for example, cats sitting in our driveway with view of the box.

Having the nest so close to our kitchen makes the Bluebird journey an important part of my

day, and it is an adjustment when they fledge – literally empty-nest syndrome. This year, in the late afternoon of the day that the first brood fledged, I was wistfully walking our dog, Ella, two blocks away from our house. Ella is an old Border Collie mix, the kind of dog that generally ignores birds and squirrels, as well as our 85-year-old California Desert Tortoise.

But on this day, Ella kept looking back and up at a telephone wire above us that we had just passed. I looked back and up to see what was attracting her attention, and there was the male Bluebird parent, who gave a cheerful chirp as he looked down at me and then accompanied us down the rest of the block on alternating telephone wires.

Having such an extended and intimate ongoing relationship to this year's broods has been a real joy, but also we have been more aware of the heart-wrenching truth we all know, that not all the offspring survive.

Our neighbor, his wife, my husband and I are all secretive about the presence of the nesting box and its occupants during nesting season. When outside, near the nesting box, we do not look up directly at box activity so as not to invite unwanted attention by predators like crows, who are known to read human cues. If any passerby happens to notice the nesting box activity and stop to watch, we politely share this knowledge and concern with them, along with telling them about the California Bluebird Recovery Program and availability of nesting boxes at the Berkeley Wild Bird store.

It can be hard when we count how many young Bluebirds we see at the end of the nesting season, but we ultimately turn our thoughts to the fact that here and now, at the beginning of winter 2021-22, we know for sure that four more Bluebirds share this world with us, and we look forward to hopefully another brood next year ... and another...

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