



BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

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



Volume 32 Summer 2026

Birds of a Feather

By Bob Franz, Orange County

"I hear some Martins, see if you can spot their house", my dad shouted one Sunday afternoon as we were taking a leisurely drive in the countryside. A few minutes later he said, "I saw a Purple Martin house behind that barn and there were two Martins on it!" And a little while later, he suddenly pulled over to the side of the road, skidded to a stop, jumped out of the car and raced across the road. When he returned, he exclaimed, "There was a Martin peeking out of a hole in a tree. I have never seen one in a natural tree cavity before!"

This behavior was not unusual for my dad, who was a dedicated lover of these glossy purple high-fliers. But the fact that he had made those observations while driving at 60 mph with his eyes on the road—well, sort of on the road—was still amazing.

For as long as I can remember, we had a Purple Martin hotel atop of a sturdy pole in our backyard in the small town of Kirkwood, Missouri. My Dad and I spent many hours on the back steps watching them soar and dip as they feasted on flying insects—and in and above Kirkwood, Missouri, there is no dearth of flying insects.

My love of birds also increased from visits to my Grandparents who lived a few blocks away. Their large yard had small areas of deciduous trees as well as all sorts of shrubbery—all of which offered good nesting sites ready to be claimed. I looked forward to going there in the spring because it was fun searching for nests of the many species of birds that called this yard their home. Usually, I could find close to a dozen species that had nested, including Northern Cardinals, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, American Robins, Wood Thrushes, Brown Thrashers, and Catbirds.

After graduating from college, I moved to Southern California, got married, and helped raise a family of three children. When the children were old enough. I took them on

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Western Bluebird Study, UCD

By Carlos Esperanza, Alameda County

For the past few weeks, members of the California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) have participated in the first range-wide genetic study of Western Bluebirds, led by UC Davis PhD student Carlos Esperanza. With the help of CBRP volunteers, Carlos and his team have trapped and collected genetic samples from adult breeding bluebirds in Sacramento, Yolo, Napa, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Alameda, and San Diego counties. These sampling efforts are part of a larger project to understand how Western Bluebirds are connected across their range and how past population declines and demographic changes may have shaped their genetic diversity.



Mist nets are used to safely capture bluebirds from nestboxes
Photo credit: Peimeng Xu, San Diego County

Western Bluebirds have a complicated history. In the early-to-mid 20th century, bluebirds went from being common across much of western North America to experiencing major declines and, in some places, near extirpation. In California's Central Valley, for example, Western Bluebirds were once common breeders, but changes to the landscape associated with agriculture, habitat loss, and the removal of suitable nesting trees contributed to their greatest decline. Today, they remain rare or absent from many areas where they were once regularly found.

This pattern is not unique to California. Across their range, historical records describe Western Bluebirds shifting their breeding distributions in response to changes in forest structure, logging, deforestation, fire, and the availability of nesting habitat. Similar declines and range changes have been documented in parts of the Southwest and west of the Cascade Mountains in Washington.

Western Bluebirds are an important part of local ecosystems. As insect-eating birds, they consume tens-of-thousands of insects each year, which benefits both natural habitats and agricultural landscapes. They are also secondary cavity nesters,

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short hikes in the nearby foothills, where we saw numerous colorful birds including one of my favorites, the Lazuli Bunting.

In May 1977, my life took a surprising turn when I read an article in *Sunset* magazine about the increasing decline of natural nesting sites for local cavity-nesters—with the greatest decline being in the Western Bluebird species—and how a local man was trying to help them survive.

His name was Dick Purvis and he was building nestboxes and placing them in parks, golfcourses, and cemeteries to provide man-made cavities for them to nest in. I was extremely interested because 1) I had never seen a Western Bluebird in the 40-plus years I had lived in Southern California and 2) I had never even seen an Eastern Bluebird, the state bird of Missouri, in more than 20 years I had spent in Missouri.

I phoned Dick and we agreed to meet in a small park several blocks from my home. As we walked from our cars, we were greeted by a pair of Western Bluebirds, and I noted their spectacular plumage of bright blue on their wings and back. Dick showed me the two nestboxes he had installed in the park 12 feet or so above the ground on tree branches—he took one down to show me the inside.

Retrieving the nestbox was amazing in itself, but not as much as seeing five small light blue eggs resting in a neat, rounded nest of mostly pine needles.

The next day I accompanied Dick as he checked six or more nestboxes surrounding a nearby golf course. I was amazed at how many were fairly close to my home and how many were occupied by these beautiful birds.

I learned from Dick that he was leading a small and dedicated group of volunteers in Orange County, California, who monitor similar trails during the 4-month nesting season of April, May, June, and July. After we finished, he asked me if I was interested in becoming a volunteer monitor—I quickly said yes.

He spent a few minutes training me on how to remove and replace a nestbox, using a swiveling basket on the end of an expandable pool pole and he assigned me. I was hooked and have been monitoring trails ever since with a year-high of 220 nestboxes viewed in 2003.

The scientific abbreviation for the Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) is SIME (derived from its binomial name). In the context of North American bird banding and field studies, it is also commonly abbreviated using the four-letter alpha code WEBL.

My children were aware of my interest in Western Bluebirds as well, but I never pushed them to get as involved as I was. It had to be voluntary on their part. One day in 2000, my elder son, Norm, suddenly voiced an interest in setting up a small trail near his home in Irvine. I learned where 11 nestboxes were, so we visited each site. I believe that Norm was as amazed as I was at this point, so I gave him a quick training session and he agreed to monitor 11 nestboxes.

The next week he was on his own and for a while Norm called me weekly to proudly report on the discoveries on his trail.

A few years later, son Randy told me he wanted to install a nestbox in his backyard to see if it would attract a Western Bluebird or two. This request was okayed by his five-year-old daughter, Isabelle, who had previously been shown some Western Bluebird nestlings in a nestbox by her Granddad.

So, I gave them a nestbox to monitor that was painted a neutral gray. But Isabelle thought it was too drab, so she covered-over the six panels with brighter colors including pink, blue and neon green—imprinting the nestbox with a more colorful, feminine touch.

Randy hung the nestbox on a tree branch in their backyard near a wooden playhouse and within a week, an adult pair of Western Bluebirds discovered it and started building a nest inside. To Isabelle's surprise and joy, the pair produced five fledglings—maybe Isabelle's paint color-scheme will start a trend.

Next in line is my daughter, Susie, who lives just north of Los Angeles. One of her previous residences was in Glendale that had a wonderful backyard with grass and trees in which we hung a Western Bluebird nestbox just begging for some cavity-nester to claim it. Our hopes ran high, but in the eight years she lived there, there were no takers. That was hard to believe because, if I were a Western Bluebird, that is exactly where I'd want to live. Nice try though, Susie.

Care for birds has now spanned four generations of Franzes. I can think of no better legacy to leave my heirs than learning how to protect our avian population.

Will there be five-generations? Grandson Dan is in his mid-twenties and just started a new job in Oakland, California. Time will tell if he can settle down long enough to think about helping Western Bluebirds thrive in his area.

California Bluebird Recovery Program Board Members

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Mike Azevedo
Program Co-Directors

Dick Blaine
Ronnie Eaton
Lesley Handa
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Contact us at info@cbrp.org

Bluebird Study, continued from page 1

meaning they cannot excavate their own nest cavities. Instead, they rely on cavities created by woodpeckers, natural decay, broken limbs, fire damage, or other processes. Because of this, breeding bluebirds can tell us something about the availability of healthy cavity-nesting habitat in a landscape.

Nest box programs, including the work of CBRP volunteers, have played a crucial role in supporting Western Bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species. By providing safe nesting opportunities in areas where natural cavities may be limited, these programs help bluebirds persist in human-altered landscapes. They also create a unique opportunity for researchers to work directly with local communities to better understand bluebird populations. Unfortunately, eBird citizen-science data reveals that Western Bluebirds are in an overall decline, despite the apparent success of nestbox programs.

Carlos is interested in understanding the genetic consequences of Western Bluebird population declines, habitat changes, and recovery efforts. Using modern genetic tools, his research will create the first high-quality reference genome for the species. A reference genome is a detailed genetic map. Once available, it can be used to compare bluebirds from different regions and ask important questions: Are populations connected to one another? Have some populations lost genetic diversity? Do bluebirds in different parts of the range show signs of adaptation to local environments?

The samples collected with the help of CBRP volunteers will contribute directly to this effort. By including birds from many parts of California, this project will help place local bluebird populations into a broader conservation context. Ultimately, the goal is to use genetics to better understand the history, health, and future of Western Bluebirds across their range.

This work would not be possible without the dedication of CBRP volunteers. Their long-term monitoring, local knowledge, and willingness to support research are helping make Western Bluebirds a model for understanding how conservation, community science, and modern genetics can work together.



Each bird that is sampled is given a USGS federal band. This can be used to identify birds and track their movement and breeding habits.
Photo credit: Amanda Newlove,
Santa Clara County

NOTE: The birds are not harmed because of the research. Some of the birds were nesting and they returned to their nests almost immediately. Observations after being measured, banded and had blood drawn indicated that the birds did not abandon their nests nor suffer injury.

If you have questions, or want to know how to contribute to this research, please contact Carlos Esperanza at cesperanza@ucdavis.edu.

Links:

<https://www.gylatucdavis.com/c-esperanza>

<https://www.birdgenoscape.org/western-bluebird/>

CBRP Donors January-June 2026 (\$1087.75)

The Fromer Charitable Trust

J. Brophy

Adelina Mbize

Ohlone Audubon Society

Mimi Pulich

Maurie J. Ange

Safari West

thank you



Photo: Becky Matsubara

From the Director's Chair

By Co-Director, Georgette Howington

Dear Friends,

When Mike Azevedo and I became Co-Directors we both decided to wait at least a year before making any changes to the California Bluebird Recovery Program. After stepping back, Dick Blaine, our Program Director, stayed on as a Board Member and consultant. He did an exemplary job during the years he led CBRP and we are very grateful he is continuing with us!



A year passed and we added new ways of communicating with you such as e-mails to share, updates, and news every 4–6 weeks. We have also offered programs on Zoom and are aiming to do so on a regular basis beginning next Spring. Tabling at community events has been fruitful and we have met many people who are interested in learning more about what monitors do and how to get involved. Your CBRP Board Members continue to grow and improve the program.

Bill Wallace is President of the SoCal Bluebird Club and adding new members regularly. Ornithologist Lesley Handa, County Coordinator for San Diego, started from ground zero to build a nest box program with San Diego Bird Alliance support and is making strides. Ronnie Eaton, County Coordinator for San Mateo County trains new monitors, participates in community events, and educates the public about the nest box program. She works in partnership with San Mateo Bird Alliance. Bruce Mushrush, our newest Board Member, is our technology expert and is creating a new website for us, developing habitat analysis tools, doing community outreach, and sending out all e-mails.

Both Mike and I are speakers in our communities, staging community events and in communication with monitors and people who are interested in the nest box program. We are both eager to improve the program and would like to hear from you if you have suggestions and ideas for us. All of us are available to answer your questions and offer guidance.

The future looks bright for CBRP, and we would like to recruit more County Coordinators for the program. If you are interested in knowing what this entails, please contact us at info@cbrp.org.

We thank each nest box monitor for your time and dedication. We look forward to receiving your data for the 2026 nesting season. We also thank the nest box builders, the Bird Alliance and Audubon representatives, supporters and organizations who have continued to be part of what has made CBRP an ongoing success for the birds!

Bluebird Blessings!

About the California Bluebird Recovery Program

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 with problems.

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, contact any board member at info@cbrp.org.

Please consider supporting our efforts. Donate via newsletter form or visit www.cbrp.org. Your contribution is tax-deductible and goes a long way in helping us conserve the bluebird population in California.

Help Prevent Injuries and Deaths from Window Strikes

By Lesley Handa, Ornithologist, San Diego County Coordinator

As I was walking to my office in downtown San Diego one August morning, I saw a stunned-looking Song Sparrow on the ground. It had a craned neck, and I immediately knew it had collided with a window. Ever since I witnessed an American Crow die instantly after hitting a window on an overpass walkway at the county court building, I've made a habit of scanning the ground around windows in the downtown area for victims of window strikes.

Examining the Song Sparrow, it appeared to suffer neurological damage sustained from the window strike. I gave up going to work on time and decided to walk back to my car to take it to Project Wildlife, but the bird died in my hand before I even made it to my car. I evaluated its body condition and determined it was healthy, complete with pristine primary feathers and a bit of fat stored in the hollow in its furcula. It was a needless loss of one of our common birds here in San Diego.

Common birds, such as this Song Sparrow, are declining across North America, with 5% of species making up 80% of the total declines in avian abundance. The primary cause of the tremendous declines in bird populations is habitat loss, but bird collisions with windows are becoming one of the leading human-caused threats to birds in North America. Each year, up to one billion birds die after colliding with glass, according to the American Bird Conservancy. Like the Song Sparrow I tried to rescue, birds may not always die immediately after the initial collision. They can sustain severe injuries, such as fractured bones and beaks, concussions, and internal bleeding. Birds that initially fly away often die elsewhere.

In one study, out of 29 window collisions, only 2 birds died immediately, leaving a carcass near the window. As a member of the Bird Collision Prevention Alliance (BCPA), the San Diego Bird Alliance encourages you to join us to help reduce bird collision impacts by using window treatments such as those suggested by the American Bird Conservancy (<https://abcbirds.org/glass-collisions/>).

Please also take a Light's Out pledge to turn off outdoor lighting during fall and spring migration and spread the word to encourage your community to act. Lights Out, San Diego! - San Diego Bird Alliance (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeNd3XBkvqgXMujLGkugS4HSiZuEvalvLOIPNcytG-Gmg7YcBQ/viewform>) or Lights Out San Francisco - Golden Gate Bird Alliance (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd-Fk1uyzibAzyzC_nBAB1BX-aanoCpz1JxljCulL7bz3t3Qpw/view-form)

As stewards supporting bird biodiversity in the State of California, we must be protective of both migratory and year-round resident birds, who are vulnerable to window collisions.

Let's all work together for the birds to help address this issue statewide!

Monitoring Nest Boxes Has Improved My Mental Health

By Tom Garry, Contra Costa County

My name is Tom Garry and I have been monitoring bird boxes since 2004 with Georgette Howington. I was diagnosed with a mental illness called paranoid schizophrenia in the 1990s. When I first started to monitor boxes, it was questionable whether I would be able to continue with monitoring because of the symptoms that affected me. But I stayed with it, and fortunately for me, nature has been an important part of helping me to cope with paranoid schizophrenia. And monitoring has helped me to develop a spiritual attitude toward nature.

Looking back over the years, I see that in addition to monitoring boxes, participating in community nature events like representing the CBRP at the Beaver Festival for 17 years, and more recently at Safari West, has helped me immensely. It is easy to gauge how my wellness has improved through the years and that my symptoms have lessened a lot. Being a nest box monitor has been very satisfying, has improved my quality of life and I plan to keep monitoring with Georgette as long as I can!



Tom Garry and
Kit Perry at Lime Ridge
in 2024

Improving Nest Box Placement in a Warming World

By Bruce Mushrush, CBRP Board Member & Conservation Technologist, Contra Costa County

As climate change drives more frequent and more severe heat events, box placement carries more weight than it once did. Monitors have always known heat is a threat. What's changing is how we understand and manage it.

Nest box-based bluebird conservation has a century-long lineage. Thomas Musselman began developing bluebird nest boxes in 1926 and pioneered the bluebird trail in the 1930s. Lawrence Zeleny later expanded that work by founding the North American Bluebird Society in 1978, among other contributions. For all that time, monitors placed boxes by feel and experience.

To help deal with today's climate: before installing a box, picture its entire day during nesting season. Where does the morning sun fall? Where is the sun at the hottest part of the afternoon, and which wall is taking it?

A cell phone app can help us better understand these dynamics. Sun Seeker (iOS and Android; the Pro version we use runs about \$30) uses augmented reality to display the sun's path directly onto the view of a site, showing where it rises, how high it climbs, and where it will be throughout the day and across the seasons.

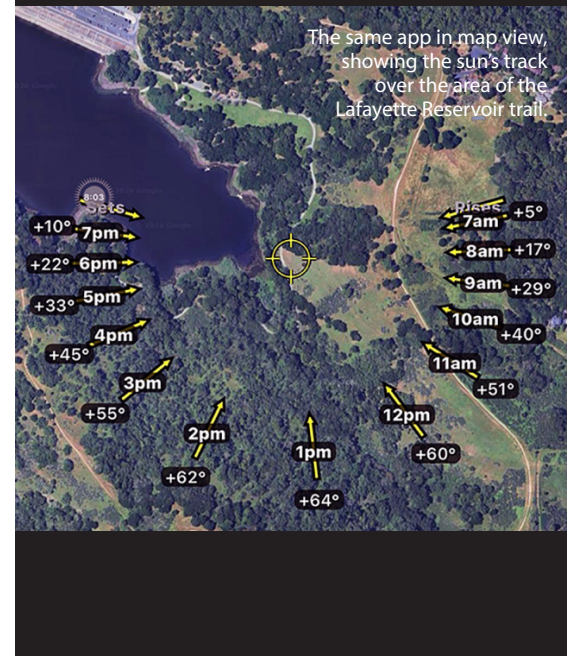
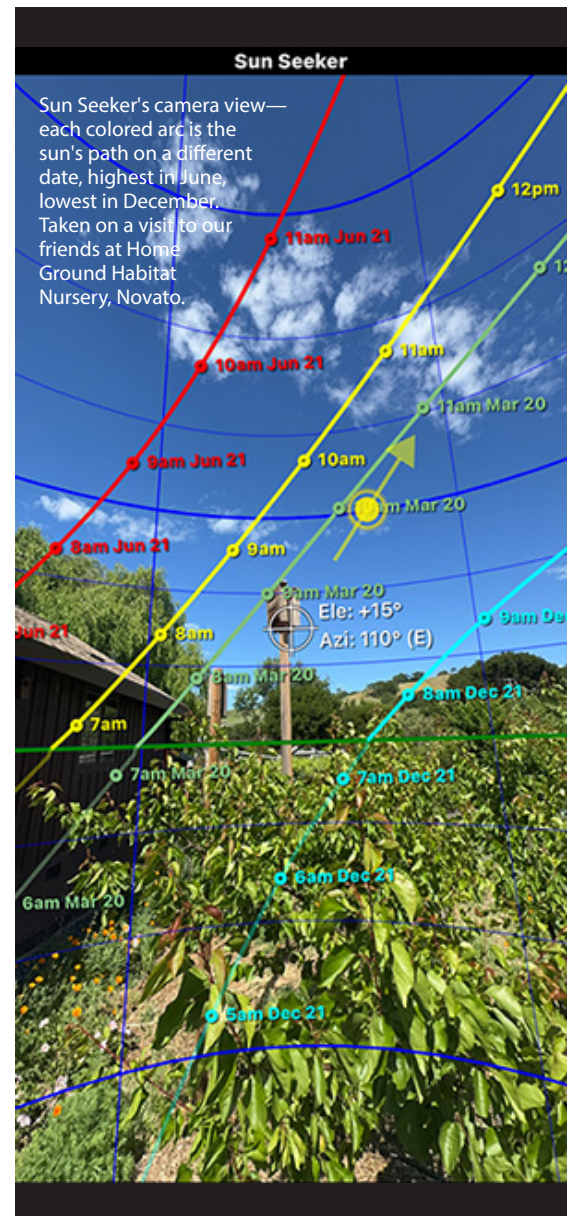
A Sun Seeker capture will usually confirm common wisdom: box entrance should face the morning sun and away from the harsh afternoon sun—meaning, in Northern California, facing northeast. But orientation is the easy part. The harder question is whether a site turns lethal in the summer heat no matter the orientation, and that's what we can now assess more accurately in advance.

Just as important, it lets us look at existing boxes with fresh eyes: a box too exposed to the late-season heat can often be saved by pulling it back to the shade of the tree line.

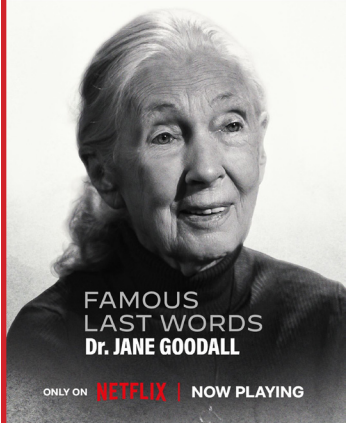
A modern cell phone is an amazing jack-of-all-trades, not a precision instrument. Its compass can drift, and its GPS can be off. Two things can be added to improve its performance: a magnetic compass and a small Bluetooth GPS receiver (we use the Garmin GLO 2) that feeds the phone more accurate coordinates. Analog and dedicated tools continue to prove their worth in our digital world.

We've begun using AI (Claude) to interpret the images captured by the app, helping us build a fuller picture of how a nest box site interacts with the sun throughout the nesting season. We'll describe this work in a future article—and your own experiments can help develop this early-stage methodology.

Sources: IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group I (2021); bluebird-trail history via the North American Bluebird Society and [Sialis.org](https://sialis.org).



RECOMMENDED VIEWING



Famous Last Words Dr. Jame Goodall (Documentary, 55 min., Netflix)

"Don't lose hope." A wonderful interview and posthumous message from Jane Goodall (1934–2025) who passed away on October 1, 2025 to all of us concerned with the health and survival of our planet and all its species. Raise a shot of Johnnie Walker Black Label to her life, legacy, and carrying on her message of hope. (You will understand the reference after viewing the documentary.)

A Difficult Spring

By Ronnie K. Eaton, San Mateo County Coordinator

This year the month of March broke records in the San Francisco Bay Area for high temperatures and lack of precipitation. It felt like the middle of summer and cavity nesting birds took notice, with Western Bluebirds (WEBL) and Tree Swallows (TRES) constructing their nests several weeks earlier than what is typical in a normal year.

For example, at Crystal Springs Golf Course (CSGC) in Burlingame, by March 23 there were nine complete Western Bluebird nests, compared to zero in 2025 on that same date. In fact, a majority of the nests had been started or completed by mid-March and by March 30, five of the Western Bluebird nests had eggs. Several Tree Swallow nest-starts were also observed.

By contrast to the weather in March, April turned cool and wet, with several days of rain and wind. Tree Swallow nesting activity essentially stopped, with no further activity in most nests. However, Western Bluebird nesting continued, and by the end of April, the mortality count was very high. It appeared that most nestlings succumbed at about two weeks of age. Accounting for observed dead nestlings only (some additional nestlings disappeared and are presumed to have been removed by a parent from the nest), there were 16 dead nestlings observed in five nests, a mortality rate of 32% of the total Western Bluebird nestlings in all nests.

I also had Western Bluebird nestling mortality on my other trails, although not to the same extent as at CSGC. I checked with some other monitors in the area and they too were disturbed by the number of dead Western Bluebird nestlings that they were finding in some boxes.

I wanted to better understand the causal factors in the mortality of these nestlings and naturally, being a monitor, I wondered, should there be a recurrence of this temperature swing during a critical phase of the nesting cycle, if anything could be done to support nestlings to successful fledge? What types of support would help them?

Meticulous Parents and a Perfect Nest

Report and Photos by Patricia Beck, Santa Clara County

One of the most rewarding parts of this nesting season was watching a pair of bluebirds' incredible attention to detail. They built a beautiful, pristine nest, keeping it perfectly situated on the bottom of the box. It was so well-constructed that I never had to step in or adjust a thing.

Once the eggs arrived, the pair became a whirlwind of activity. They were fiercely dedicated parents, and I managed to capture some great photos of their daily routine:

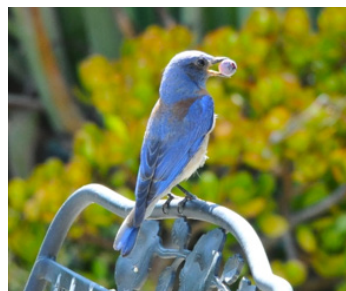
- **A Varied Diet:** They brought back an impressive menu for the growing family, including insects and some surprisingly large berries.
- **Housekeeping Duty:** The pair made countless trips back and forth just to keep the nest meticulously clean.
- **Constant Vigilance:** When they weren't hunting or cleaning, they spent hours perched on or near the box. Sometimes one would keep watch alone; other times, they sat peacefully side-by-side.

Weathering the Storm

The journey wasn't entirely without a hitch. The female originally laid a full clutch of six eggs. However, right as she started laying, our area was hit by a week of severe, miserable weather.

Ultimately, only three of the six eggs hatched. Given the freezing temperatures and harsh conditions mom had to endure while trying to start her clutch, I definitely give her a pass!

The good news is that the three chicks who did hatch were incredibly healthy, active, and strong. Watching this dedicated pair overcome the elements to successfully raise their trio was an unforgettable backyard birding experience.



Western Bluebirds at The Forum

Report by Dick Blaine, Santa Clara County
Photos by Merrie Asimow

Five years ago, my wife and I moved to The Forum at Rancho San Antonio, a senior living community in the Cupertino foothills, nestled right against the Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve. Having set up feeders and nest boxes at our villa, we have enjoyed documenting the local wildlife; over the years, residents have observed more than 90 species on the property, and we have personally spotted over 40.

Typically, our nest boxes are busy with White-breasted Nuthatches or Western Bluebirds. Sadly, this year was a difficult one—our six Western Bluebird hatchlings did not survive, likely due to abandonment by the parents, as there were no signs of predation.

However, hope arrived next door. My neighbor, the talented visual artist and photographer Merrie Asimow, hosted a box that produced six beautiful Western Bluebird eggs. We monitored the progress together, and I am happy to report that five of them successfully hatched and fledged. Merrie captured stunning photographs of the hatchlings, as well as the proud father. Please enjoy her beautiful work.



Next Generation Conservation: High Schoolers Take on Monitoring Bird Boxes by their School

Report by Eleanor Thornton, Sacramento

This year I was fortunate to be among eight high school juniors at Rio American High School to monitor five bird boxes along the American River in Sacramento. Our project began when local ornithologist Dan Airola came to speak in our AP Environmental Science class. He shared about his project to install and monitor bird boxes along the American River and to build a dataset that can be used to advocate for more bird-friendly policies along the river.

Two of my classmates were inspired and pitched their own idea for a nest box study to our AP Environmental Science teacher. After coordinating with Mr. Airola, it was decided that a group of students would monitor a few boxes along the school's river entrance. While our initial plan was to build and install ten new boxes along the fence line of the school, time was running out for the nesting season. When we couldn't get permission quickly from the school district, we shifted our focus to five boxes that Mr. Airola and colleagues erected for us along the adjacent American River Parkway.

In early March, Mr. Airola trained us on how to properly collect the data, how to avoid causing early fledging and handle the chicks in the case it happened, and what to look for to identify the species. Within a week after we began our monitoring, Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) moved into all five boxes! While we prepared ourselves for the possibility of hatchling mortality, we were incredibly fortunate to find that our first broods had a 100% success rate, with all chicks being raised to fledge.

We did have one scare, an early fledging was triggered when we startled the babies when checking the box, and three babies rushed out. However, we fell back on what Mr. Airola had taught us and we were able to collect them all and place them back into the box. Later we watched from a distance as they successfully fledged. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, to watch the birds that we had seen grow from the tiniest eggs soar above us, learning how to hunt with their parents.

The successful fledging of the chicks was a bittersweet moment. While we were so grateful to see them all fly the nest, we were sad that the project was ending so soon. Our initial goal was to test the hypothesis that double brooding would occur, and whether that would be affected by the presence of a previous nest. However, few of us actually expected our boxes to see another brood this season. But with California's wet winter and extended rainy season, the nesting season extended, and within one week after all of the boxes had become empty, a pair of Tree Swallows claimed box five and laid two eggs. By the next week four out of the five boxes were once again occupied by swallows.

This project has had a profound impact on all of us, and while not all of my colleagues are certain they want to pursue a career in the environmental sciences, we all agree that seeing the birds in all stages of life has brought us closer to wildlife. For myself, working on this project has solidified my commitment to a

career in environmental science and conservation, and the experience in the field so early in my education has been amazing. We plan to continue to monitor the boxes through the second brood and stay vigilant for the rare possibility of a third clutch. We also plan to return next school year to continue to monitor the boxes and to teach the next set of student researchers how to collect data, minimize early fledging, and care for the boxes.



Our first ever eggs, first brood



First two eggs in Box Five in the second brood



Eleanor Thornton carrying one of the early fledglings back to the nest

FIELD REPORTS continued

Kestrel Cam

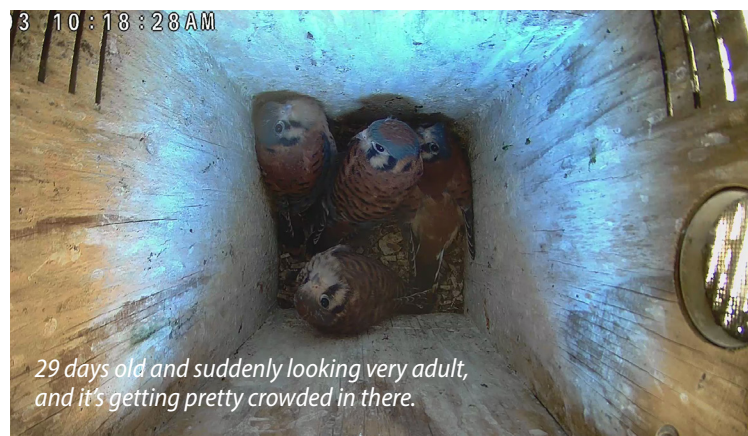
Report by Amanda Newlove and Lee Pauser, Santa Clara County

For the past two seasons, we have had the opportunity to follow a family of American Kestrels from egg-laying and brooding through hatching and their month of rapid growth inside the nest box. These photos show just how quickly these tiny fluffballs develop.

Making these observations possible required Lee Pauser's creativity and engineering skills. Because the nest box is located in an area without electricity or internet access, he designed and installed a solar-powered Wi-Fi camera system to provide a safe, non-intrusive view inside the box. In addition to providing live views, the camera records motion-activated clips 24/7 which can be viewed and downloaded. The setup includes a protective cage around the solar panel and an additional perch to encourage the Kestrels to land away from the equipment and, ahem, not "paint" the solar panel. The Kestrel parents seem to enjoy using the perch as a landing zone before and after delivering food to the hungry youngsters. As the chicks grow, they become increasingly rambunctious, and the parents quickly make their food deliveries and retreat from the chaos.

Using a portable Wi-Fi router and my smart phone from a distance, we can check on the nest as often as we like without opening the box or disturbing the birds. The camera has provided a fascinating glimpse into daily life inside the nest, allowing us to witness the changes that occur over the month. It has also given us a look at their diet, which consists primarily of lizards and insects such as beetles and crickets.

From tiny, fluffy chicks to feisty young Kestrels nearly ready to fledge, the camera has given us a front-row seat to one of nature's most remarkable transformations. This year, we are proud to report that all four babies— three males and one female— successfully fledged and took their first flights into the big world.



When Nature Doesn't Follow Our Plans

Report by Olivia Qian, Contra Costa County

On the morning of June 7, Georgette, Tom, and I set out to monitor Nest Box 6 at Lafayette Reservoir. It was our fifth week monitoring nest boxes for the California Bluebird Recovery Program and my first season as a volunteer monitor. The morning began like many others. Two Tree Swallow broods had already fledged, allowing us to clean their nest boxes, while healthy Western Bluebird and Tree Swallow chicks continued growing in two nearby boxes.

As we reached Nest Box 6, something unusual caught our attention. A gray, rounded shape rested on the Noel Guard, the wire cage attached to the entrance of the nest box. From a distance, we assumed it was one of the Tree Swallow parents sitting unusually still. However, as we approached, we realized we were looking at something entirely unexpected. A small, neatly woven nest made of dry twigs and conifer needles sat on top of the Noel Guard. Looking closer with a phone camera, we found three small white eggs.

"It doesn't look like a Tree Swallow nest."

Then it clicked. A House Finch had built its own nest directly on top of the Noel Guard.

Our attention immediately shifted back to the Tree Swallows. When we carefully opened the nest box, the Tree Swallow nest remained inside, but the adults were gone and the nestlings lay motionless. Although we could not determine exactly what had happened, we wondered whether the House Finch nest had affected the Tree Swallows' ability to use the nest box. We could only record what we observed, not the exact cause.

The next decision was unexpectedly difficult. Should we remove the House Finch nest? Doing so might have allowed Tree Swallows to use the box again later in the season. On the other hand, the House Finches had already laid eggs and were simply trying to raise their own family. After discussing our options, we chose not to intervene. Competition for nesting sites is part of nature, and we believed it was not our role to decide which species should succeed.

When we returned one week later, the House Finch nest contained a fourth egg. The female remained nearby while we documented the nest and soon returned after we stepped away. Seeing that the nest had not been abandoned reassured us that the breeding attempt was continuing successfully.

During our third monitoring visit, we found that one egg had hatched while three eggs remained in the nest. Because the nest sat fully exposed on the Noel Guard, Georgette later placed a towel over part of the guard to provide shade and reduce wind exposure without disturbing the birds.

This experience changed the way I think about nest box monitoring. I expected to learn how to identify nests, count eggs, and collect data. Instead, Nest Box 6 taught me that every nest tells a different story. Sometimes those stories have happy



House Finch nest on the Noel Guard



House Finch eggs



Olivia Qian

endings, and sometimes they do not. As monitors, our responsibility is not to control nature but to observe carefully, document honestly, and respect the lives unfolding before us, even when nature doesn't follow our plans.

OLIVIA QIAN is a high school senior and first season volunteer with the California Bluebird Recovery Program. She founded a birdwatching club in high school and hopes to pursue wildlife conservation and biological research. She enjoys sharing stories from the field that inspire others to appreciate native birds.

CBRP Logos Over the Years

By Dick Blaine, Santa Clara County

Ever since Don Yoder launched the California Bluebird Recovery Program in 1994, our organization's emblem has evolved alongside our conservation efforts. Now, as the board considers designing a brand-new logo, we are taking a nostalgic look back through the archive. To preserve a piece of CBRP history, I have gathered the many logos used in our publications over the years. See below how our visual style has changed and where each logo made its official debut.

Logo #1: CBRP Announcement, 1994, Don Yoder

Logo #2: Newsletter V1N1 Summer 1995, Don Yoder

Logo #3: Newsletter V1N2 Fall 1995, Don Yoder

Logo #4: Newsletter V6N3 Autumn 2000, Don Yoder

Logo #5: Newsletter V10N3 Summer 2004, Don Yoder

Logo #6: Flyer (Tree) 2006, Don Yoder

Logo #7: 2006 Monitor Guide, page 31, Hatch Graham

Logo #8: Newsletter V16N2 Summer 2011, Dick Blaine

Logo #9: Newsletter V21N1 Winter 2015, Bruce Mushrush

Logo #10: Newsletter V27N2 Summer 2021, Bruce Mushrush



Logo#1



Logo #2



Logo #3



Logo#4



Logo #5



Logo #6



Logo#7



Logo #8



Logo #9



Logo#10

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*CBRP is a nonprofit project of the North American Bluebird Society,
National Audubon Society - California, and Mount Diablo Bird Alliance*