

BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

www,cbrp.org

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

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

Inside this issue

IS IT ANY WONDER?

We are told that for five decades the Bluebird population declined because of many factors; lack of habitat, invasive species, disease, predators, etc. Thanks to all our efforts, the Eastern and Western Bluebirds are returning in great numbers. In this issue are two articles of additional threats noted in Southern California, <u>crows</u> and <u>rats</u>. With the encouragement of **Steve Simmons**, several folks are adding barn owl nest boxes to help control the rats. The crows are way overpopulated in Orange County and have been seen killing newly fledged chicks. No one seems to have a solution to the overpopulation of crows. Even the West Nile Virus a couple years ago didn't seem to put a dent in their numbers.

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THINGS THAT MAKE US GOOPY ABOUT WEBLS

Throughout each nesting season, we monitors experience many delightful and satisfying events and each new one seems to surpass the last. **Jim Semelroth** and I thought it would be interesting to do a fun, but unscientific survey of members of the SCBC and find out what trail events were special to each of them. To help confine the choices to a manageable number, we made a list of 11 items and asked the members to rate them from 1 to 11. The following tabulates 25 responses and here are some of the most meaningful results:

Most #1 votes

| "Seeing the first newborn nestling at the beginning of the season." | 7 votes |
|---|---------|
| "Having bluebirds eat meal worms from your hand." | 7 votes |
| "Observing bluebirds flying in front of you with their blue colors flashing." | 4 votes |

Most votes when adding #1 + #2 + #3 votes

"Seeing the first newborn nestling at the beginning of the season."

16 votes

"Seeing the reaction of children when shown a nest, eggs and/or nestlings inside a nestbox."

13 votes

"Installing a nestbox in a new location and observing a bluebird immediately flying to it."

9 votes

Bob Franz

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BLUEBIRDS FLY!



The Director's Chair

McClellan Ranch Park in Santa Clara County. This is the trail I monitor. It is located one mile from my house in a natural park in the city of Cupertino which also serves as the home for the Santa Clara County Audubon Society. Temperatures in the Santa Clara Valley are now into the 80's fairly consistently. Only Violet Green Swallows and House Wrens are still building nests at McClellan Ranch Park. Several unusual occurrences this season. For one, we have not had a second brood of any species that commonly nests here. Another is that we have House Wrens for the first time in recorded history (10 years) – in fact, six nests. Finally Chestnut–backed Chickadees are nesting in both small and standard sized boxes – I guess they feel safe in this park What is going on?

CBRP On-line Discussion Group: the CABLUEBIRDS, Yahoo group supports discussions oriented toward general issues involving cavity nesting species and CBRP; the group is monitored by **Mike Azevedo**, Santa Clara County CBRP coordinator. To join this group, link to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cabluebirds/join.

Audubon Grant Program: Earlier this spring CBRP announced a grant program to assist in funding construction and upgrading of nest boxes through local Audubon chapters in California; the idea is to get California Audubon more involved with CBRP. So far three grants have been awarded as follows: **Holly Sletteland**, Morro Coast Audubon in San Luis Obispo Co.; **Phil Persons**, Madrone Audubon in Sonoma; and **Robert Carlton**, Mt. Diablo Audubon in Contra Costa Co. An additional grant request is expect shortly from Santa Clara County. It is not too late to submit your request. For more information, see http://cbrp.org/CBRP Grant Audubon Posting.htm and http://cbrp.org/grant requirements. htm.

On-Line Database and Analysis Tools: As the 2010 nesting season nears its end, people are already entering their data. It makes sense to enter data after completion of each brood and I encourage you to enter nest-by-nest data rather than totals. New to the web database is an article on the data and several analysis techniques available to those of you who like data or just want to see how your trails(s) performed over the past 10 years.

Dick Blaine - dick@theblaines.net

http://cbrp.org - CBRP Web site

http://www.eichlerrealtor.com/birds3/ - CBRP On-line database and analysis tools

California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP) Board Members

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Dave Cook, Board Member — justdave50@earthlink.net
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Jim Semelroth, Editor,— jimsemweed@cox.net

NABS FALL 2010 MEETING

The North American Bluebird Society Conference will be held in Ontario from September 9-12. See *Bluebird, Journal of the North American Bluebird Society*, Spring 2010, Vol. 32 No. 2 or http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org for details

CBRP WORKING TO GET CALIFORNIA DATA INTO NATIONAL DATABASE AT CORNELL

CBRP is currently working with the Citizen Science Project at Cornell University to integrate the 1996-2009 on-line data into NestWatch, Cornell's national database.

Ideally, the techniques will also allow any NestWatch monitor to upload data from their own computers by means of a spreadsheet. We are also discussing the possibility of integrating our 1995-2009 species/trail level data at a future time. Stay tuned for progress on these important steps on data integration. **Dick Blaine, CBRP Director,** has been working for several years to find a way to integrate CBRP data into the largest avian database in the nation. When accomplished with the hard work by **Joe Alfonso and Laura Burkholder** at Cornell in cooperation with **Dick** and our programmer, **Cynthia Berg,** national bluebird and cavity nester current and historical data will be more complete than ever and we'll have a more accurate picture of the state of the Western Bluebird and other cavity nesters.

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

Our Mission

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

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

Learn More

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

http://www.cbrp.org

http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org

http://www.socalbluebirds.org

http://www.sialis.org

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

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

California Bluebird Recovery Program - Contributors

Contributions to date for 2010

| Cont | ributors | County | Contributors | | County |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Andy & Katty | Aldrich | Tuolumne | Margot & Robert | Jensen* | San Joaquin |
| Jim | Aldrich | Tuolumne | Linda | Johnson | San Diego |
| Doris | Allison | Amador | Amy | Kernes | Orange |
| Beatrice North | Bland* Bluebird So | | Sharon | Kramer | Orange |
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| Mike | Clayton | Orange | John Katherine | Lowrie* Lowrie* | VA WA |
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| Sandra | Dempewolf | San Diego | Bill & Fran- | | |
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| | | Sacra- | Samuel | Sperry | Contra Costa |
| Ken | Head | mento | Andy | Truban | San Diego |
| Susan | Henderson | San Mateo Contra | Peter | Wetzel | Orange |
| Nancy | Hobert | Costa | | | |

^{*}These donations are in memory of **Karin Lowrie**, who loved her Bluebirds

I Hate Those Ol' Crows!

By Dianne Schmidt

I'm just a few months in to being a bluebird nestbox monitor, so I consider myself a "newbie" at all of this. But the other day I experienced something that certainly tested both my patience and nerves.

It all started very simply. I was just nearing the end of my rounds on my bluebird trail. It is the end of May so I'm in peak fledgling season. I had lots of success so far with my nestboxes and had been thoroughly enjoying my new experience as a monitor.

But as I drove up to my next box location I noticed that there was a lot of bird activity. To my horror there were about 3 to 4 crows right near my bluebird nestbox. The two parent bluebirds were going nuts and swooping down at the crows. I quickly realized that there was a fledgling on the ground and the crow was trying to get it. Well, I sprang into action and grabbed my long blue lifter pole out of the car. I didn't take into consideration where I was nor that a screaming woman with a pole running from her car would seem out of place in a busy beach parking lot. My only mission was to save that little fledgling. Luckily the crow was so startled that he dropped the fledgling right out of his mouth when he saw me running towards him. Then he flew up onto a nearby branch. I quickly grabbed the fledgling who didn't seem to be hurt just as I looked up only to see the next fledgling leave the nestbox and the chase was on!

This time I had got the attention of a couple of people in the park. Those few that didn't think I had completely lost my mind started to try to help scare the crows. But these fledglings can fly! They didn't just drop to the ground in front of the box, but rather they flew a good 50 feet away. (A good thing to keep in mind if your nestboxes are pointed towards a street!).

Since I was already holding one fledgling I couldn't run to help the next one. But someone ran to get it and brought it back to me just as fledgling #3 flew out of the box to follow his nest mate. So, the chase was on again. After someone retrieved that fledgling I now had three babies in my shirt. The parent bluebirds were still going crazy and the crows were hanging out like gargoyles just waiting for some more action. I was beside myself at this point and went back to my car with the fledglings and sat inside waiting for the crows to lose interest. I ended up waiting a full 45 minutes until I finally felt it was safe enough to put the fledglings out where mama and papa bluebird could tend to them and hopefully find them a good hiding spot.

I felt good as I finally drove away because I saw the parents tending to the babies with no crows in sight. But when I got home I have to admit that I ended up opening a bottle of wine to calm my frazzled nerves. I also put an immediate call in to **Sully Reallon** to tell him about my experience. Sully is not only my bluebird trail mentor, but, he's become my part time psychologist for situations like this one. Thanks for listening Sully!

Editor's Notes



BLUEBIRDS EVERYWHERE

In my PowerPoint presentation I have included a section that shows the use of Bluebirds in advertising, movies and music. In last month's issue, I included a picture of a Datsun Bluebird car, made in Japan. One doesn't hear of songs and movies praising the Starling or Crow. Songwriters, movie makers and pitchmen, most of whom have probably never seen a bluebird, have used our little birds as metaphors for hope, happiness, lost loves. On her website, Sialis, E.A. Zimmerman cites some of these uses of the Bluebird to explain how we get "so goopy" over the Blues. I have added clips of songs in my presentation and folks young and old love them. The older folks remember The White Cliffs of Dover sung by WWII warbler, Vera Lynn, using the Bluebird as a sign of hope that the War would soon be over. They also remember Academy Award winner, Zipadeedodah, sung by James Baskett, and Judy Garland singing Somewhere Over the Rainbow from the Wizard of Oz, made in 1939. Oddly, the kindergartners also are very familiar with this 71 year-old song. "That's Dorothy!" they say. Recently, I added an upbeat version by Disney star, Miley Cirus, whom the kids relate to. Leave it to Disney to not miss a trick to make a buck. The other day I was on Youtube and came across Neil Young, whom I had never heard. I saw a clip of Beautiful Bluebird, a song lamenting the departure of his girlfriend, using the Bluebird as metaphor. Needless to say, I pasted this song into my show, but haven't tested it on captive audiences yet.

A few other songs using our birds are:

1955: Marvin Rainwater sang *Gonna Find Me A Bluebird* on Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scout TV Show. It became a runaway hit.

1964: Frank Sinatra recorded *I Wish You Love* - written by A. A. Beach & C. Trenet.

Irving Berlin wrote *Blue Skies*, sung by Frank Sinatra

Kentucky Bluebird, Keith Whitley Bluebird by Paul McCartney Saturday Night, by the Eagles (2009) Check out these songs on Youtube.

I thought of one song with sparrows, *His Eye is on the Sparrow*, a spiritual I heard Eubie Blake sing at Preservation Hall in New Orleans. Let me know if you hear a song using Starlings as metaphor for hope or Happiness.

Jim Semelroth, jimsemweed@cox.net



Biggest Bluebird seen this year
A Bluebird Bus
Bluebird Corporation
Fort Valley, GA

See the Bluebird logo above the door?

BLUEBIRD NEWS

CBRP DATA AND ANALYSIS

CBRP has been collecting trail-level data since 1999 and since 2006, with the advent of the on-line data base, has been collecting nest box-level data. These data are available for viewing and analysis. See the section on PROGRAM RESULTS in the CBRP web site, http://cbrp.org. In addition there is an comprehensive article discussing these data and methods for their analysis.

AUDUBON INTERNATIONAL AUDUBON COOPERATIVE SANCTUARY PROGRAM FOR GOLF COURSES (ACSP)

My name is **Mike Clayton** and I am a member of the So. Cal. Bluebird Club. I am currently assisting the golf course Superintendent at Coto De Caza Golf Course in South Orange County, California to become certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) golf course.

In populated areas where natural habitats are being altered or fragmented, golf courses are some of the last remaining open space. Besides being a place for recreation and relaxation, golf courses, when properly designed and managed, can also serve as sanctuaries for wildlife. The key lies in providing native, coastal-adapted plants for food and cover, conserving water and preserving its natural quality, and carefully managing fertilization and pest control.

This course currently has eight Bluebird nest boxes which will be expanded to twenty. Barn Owl boxes will be added for rodent control. Also Bat houses to help control insects.

Last, but not least, ACSP program improves the quality of our land, water, and air and helps to conserve natural resources for future generations. **Mike Clayton**

WONDERFUL VIDEO AVAILABLE

There is a wonderful video showing stop-action shots of bluebirds tending their nest box. http://videos.birdsandblooms.com/video/Connies-Bluebird-Nest/player. Check out this great stop action bluebird feeding. Copy this URL into your address line and go.



TALES FROM THE TRAILS

Food Snatcher

While checking a nest box at Sycamore Park in Lake Forest I observed a male Bluebird thrashing a large bug against the pavement in an apparent effort to reduce it to edible size when a Lizard ran across the pavement and snatched the bug. The perplexed Bluebird then flew empty mouthed to protest my examining his brood of 5 healthy chicks in the nearby nest box. **Earl Garrison**

I finally got the nerve to look in the box today. Actually, Monte did it for me after a lot of coaxing. Everyone thinks it's wrong to do, but now that they see the birds are still around even after we peeked, I think they've changed their minds some. I have 5 beautiful little blue eggs!! The female is still the brave one and will sit very close to me. The male is a chicken. haha... and they say the men are supposed to be the brave ones. I've attached a couple of pictures of me and my new girlfriend.

(See next page) Dava Romaniello

One day I was working in my garage with the garage door open and a half finished nest box on my saw. A bluebird came up to the box and checked it out just a couple feet from me.

Dick Purvis

Peg and Pauline

"There he is!" Missing for two days - left all the housework and nursery preparation to the expectant mother - and now he shows up. But, something is not right. He can't seem to stand up straight and stays away from the house and mother-to-be. After some delay he comes to the table and the dinner plate. It's now obvious – he's missing all the toes on his right foot and a claw on the left. What a sad beginning – this

beautiful couple, male and female western Bluebirds and the male, now severally handicapped, has barely escaped with his life. This "survivor" tries hard and becomes the topic of every observance and conversation. It seems fit to name them Peg (short for peg-leg) and Pauline. He is faced with many challenges. We didn't see the attack but the number one suspect is a nest of Mockingbirds in the neighbor's yard, they constantly harass the Bluebirds, try to steal their food and chase them away from the birdhouse.

Peg and Pauline hatched five chicks; all fledged but only four returned "home." It's said that the most dangerous time in a bird's life is the moments after leaving the nest.

But, there's no rest or "empty nest" syndrome for this couple. As we continue to feed, observe, and be entertained by the three remaining young, Pauline has built a new nest, laid another five eggs and, as of this writing, we have four naked baby chicks and one egg. We are blessed. Jim & Dottie Rogers

I have a nest box at a school in Laguna Niguel. Last year, the first year, it produced four fledglings. This year, the pair had a nest, but vandals knocked the box down and destroyed the nest. After rehanging the box, again, the box was brought down. On the next visit, the box was missing, but was found in a classroom with four eggs in it. After rehanging the box the female incubated and four chicks hatched. On the next visit, the box was on the ground again with four nestlings dead in the box.

TALES FROM THE TRAILS-II

I removed the box and rehung it in a different tree. The persistent female built a nest, hatched and fledged four chicks. The kindergartners were relieved and happy. **Jim Semelroth**

We are involved with our bluebirds in our yard and check the box frequently. We feed them mealworms regularly. On June 12 things were too quiet, no birds begging for mealworms. At 10:00 I checked the nest box.

To my dismay, I found the female dead on the nest with her breast partially eaten. The 4 week-old chicks, healthy the night before were all dead, although not bitten. There were two rat droppings at the edge of the nest. We also lost two males to a hawk.

Walter Burch

Just returned from my trail and was fortunate to have a Mother on the nest. She just waited there patiently for me, as I got my camera out to take the picture. When I arrived at the nest (the same one from last week, with the two eggs in it), there was a Grandpa and a Grandson playing ball right beneath the nest. I had to ask them to excuse me, as I had a nest to look into. They were surprised to know that there was this nest, right above their heads. So, when I took the nest down, the Grandpa (Bob) wanted to show his Grandson, who was about 6 years old. When I opened the nest, here was the Mother (I think this is the Female!), on the nest. Bob held the nest with the door open for me, so I could take the picture. Afterwards, I put the camera on "Review" for his Grandson to look at the picture. This way, we were able to return

the nest to it's origin and not molest the parent too much. Larry Fulton

Thought you might like to know that the banded male is nesting again at the same box (San Antonio Park) this year. This is the ninth consecutive year a banded male has used that box and most likely is one of the birds banded from my trail in 2001. If so, he should be about nine years old in a few months and I can't find any records of WEBL living to nine years. Although there was an EABL that lived to ten years.

Yesterday a friend of a friend came and took photos of the band from about eight feet away from the bird but didn't know if he would be able to read it. The bird is very easy to photograph because I bring mealworms during checkups. A photographer with a zoom lens would have a good three minutes to take photos and try to capture the band number.

Linda Violett

City sprayed Bt for caterpillars in April. We attempted to stop them but they only agreed to not spray trees wherein next boxes were hung. Fledgling mortality related to loss of caterpillars to feed young, we surmise. **Nancy**

Arbuckle and Anne Miller, 2009



Dava Romaniello's girlfriend within a mile of the Pacific Ocean in Orange County.

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

A NESTING SEASON FOR A GOOD DETECTIVE

This nesting season I've felt like Sherlock Holmes. The amount of nest predation and dead birds in my boxes on the Aliso Viejo Golf Course have been perplexing. Not even a close examination of all the dead birds with my magnifying glass has provided a clue. My hunch is there is more than one explanation. I welcome any others.

The House Wren is certainly among my top suspects. Why? Simply because of their numbers and attempts to occupy boxes. I have seen no House Sparrows in the three years I've been monitoring. Nor snakes. (I've been keeping a census.) Can we agree, too, that it's certainly conceivable that some birds were carrying some kind of virus this year? I found another unpleasantness, however. A few weeks ago I checked a box expecting to see four birds on the verge of fledging. Instead what I found was nothing short of a massacre. The nest was chaotic. Fresh blood was splattered on the walls. The male parent was decapitated. Female and four chicks were dead of severe wounds. When removing the nest, an unexpected occupant raced out. Big, brown with long hairless tail... Uh huh. That discovery possibly explains why an entire nest and all five hatchlings disappeared from another box close to that of the massacred family. I've got to tell you, when I stared at that empty box I wondered if I was going crazy. Had I miss-recorded what was in that box? Was some golfer or maintenance man playing a nasty prank? It's reassuring to have a reasonably good explanation now. Could rats also account for missing eggs?

The problem is the suspect list keeps growing. For the first time on the golf

course, a Mountain Chickadee has successfully usurped a bluebird nest. (This box belongs to another monitor.) But the fascinating thing is, the chickadee also lost her first set of eggs to predation. She has since laid a second and they have hatched. So, Sherlock asks, was she the predator of the bluebird eggs or was she just an opportunist when the bluebird eggs were predated by another bird or critter? Don't you suspect, the answer is more likely the second? But folks, Sherlock has something else to ponder. Can Long-tailed weasels fit in the hole of a bluebird box? There is one (at least) on the golf course. I know they can climb trees and they sometimes eat birds. My oh my! For those who enjoy a good mystery, I've got a golf course route for you!

PS. Yes, I have been working on a rodent guard. After buying sheet metal, sheets of aluminum and a dog's cone collar I finally landed on a novel rodent guard for three of my nest boxes. (It's an experiment.) A handyman friend made a hole in the center of a simple metal bowl (the kind you may have in your kitchen). We slipped it over the wire hook facing upside down and we supported it from below with a cork so it does not slip. Those who have used this method say that rats are sufficiently deterred by the wobbliness of the bowl when they step on it from above. The bowl apparently does not necessarily need to extend past the lid of the box. Sherlock is skeptical but will be watching. Meanwhile, I have permission from the superintendent at the course to put up owl boxes and am working on that right now. I learned from **Steve Simmons** that the average nesting Barn Owl family consumes about 47 rodents a night. Time to bring in the big guns. Gillian Martin

California Bluebird Recovery Program County Coordinators January 2010

| County | First | Last | City | Home# | Email |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| Calvaras | Jack | Lynch | Angles Camp | 209-736-2349 | jackplynch@sbcglobal.net |
| Contra Costa | Georgette | Howington | Pleasant Hill | 925-686-4392 | Georgette@birdscape.net |
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Newsletter Vol. 16, No. 2 Summer, 2010

California Bluebird Recovery Program's

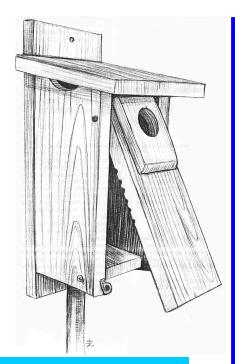
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Please enroll me in the California Bluebird Recovery Program

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