



# Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter – Fall 2006

*An affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society*



## From the President's Nest Box -By Dave Flaming

The 2006 season has come to a close and preliminary numbers indicate we have had another successful season! On September 16<sup>th</sup> we had our annual Fall Wrap-up meeting at Champoeg State Heritage Area. This is the gathering where our volunteers have the opportunity to share their bluebird stories. Guest speaker at the meeting was our own bander, Dan Sherman. In addition to his bluebird activities, Dan is a volunteer for Hawk Watch International. Dan presented an informative slide show of this organization's Bonney Butte Project located here in Oregon. Dan's up-close & personal raptor photos were fantastic!

A fun feature of the wrap-up meeting was Charlie Stalzer and his logo stenciling project. Charlie developed a silk screen of PBRP's logo and applied it to our T-shirts. Charlie and his stenciling equipment will be at the 2007 Spring Workshop to be held on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Mark your calendar!

PBRP's Board of Directors was host to an ice cream social held at Champoeg State Heritage Area in July. Charlie Stalzer made

beautiful redwood "2006 Thank You" plaques which were given to each of the volunteers and homeowners in attendance. A special thanks goes to Lesley Kempzell and Becky Snyder for organizing this event.

After serving as Education Director for a number of years, Lynn Ahern resigned, as she has moved out of the state. If you are interested in coordinating our speaking program, please contact me.

PBRP's board member Ron McDow found it necessary to resign his director position. The board has elected Becky Snyder to complete Ron's term of office. Welcome to the board, Becky!

"Thank you" to each of our volunteers and to all of our wonderful homeowners for another great season! -Dave



### Important Dates

**February 10, 2007**  
**PBRP Spring Workshop – Champoeg**  
**State Heritage Area**

**September 20-23, 2007**  
**NABS Annual Convention – Athens, GA**

## Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

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**Banders:** Lyn Burniston, Gaila Couch, Dave Flaming, Nancy Fraser, Carole Hallett, Bunny Hirtzel, Pat Johnston, Jim Kreutzbender, Lauri Kunzman, Ron McDow, Brenda McGowan, Carol Munger, Fred Robinson, Karen Russell, Dan Sherman, Michael Terramin, Dennis Wiley  
**Assisting the Banders:** Bob Burbank, Gordon Kraft, Becky Snyder, Onalee Wasserberger



*Original bluebird art created by reader Barry Shapiro*

## Spring Workshop 2007

The Spring Workshop will be held on Saturday, February 10, 2007, at Champoeg State Heritage Area Visitor's Center. I am excited to be planning the event, and want to make it more informative and valuable to our morning guests (and prospective monitors). I am going to convene a small working group to select topics, speakers, and formats. I hope to involve a long-time PBRP volunteer, as well as a monitor who has recently joined us, in order to get the unique perspective of each. Please save this date on your calendars.

**9:00am – 12:00pm – New Monitors**  
**1:00pm – 3:00pm – Returning Monitors and Banders**

See [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com) or call (503) 245 - 8449 for directions to Champoeg Heritage Area.

*-Nancy Fraser, Monitor and Bander*



## Ice-Cream Social Recap

*By Becky Snyder, Board Member*

On a sunny July day we had an ice cream social to thank all of our dedicated monitors and homeowners for helping encourage the proliferation of bluebirds. It was held at the scenic Champoeg Park just south of Newberg. We gathered in the historic pavilion by a winding river path. We stuffed ourselves with ice cream and various yummy toppings. I thought the most inspired topping was the mealworms! Bluebirds love them, too.

Mike Niss, the park ranger, told us the story of how pioneers met at the pavilion for the first territorial government meeting. While not quite as historical, it was fun for us to get together with a lot of people with an interest in bluebirds. We compared stories of bluebirds dive-bombing us, miniature nestlings overcoming all odds, prolific parent birds, and theories on how to improve nest boxes and survival rates.

Charlie Stalzer made 250 wooden decorative plaques as thank you gifts for everybody involved. We also got to take home some very informative books on Mountain Bluebirds. Thank you all for being part of PBRP!



## What Do Bluebirds Eat in the Winter?

*By Dr. Kevin Berner, Reprinted with permission*

The truth is that we don't know. We do know that because insects are scarce, they eat berries and seeds, but which ones they favor is unknown. But Dr. Kevin Berner, Associate Professor in the Fisheries and Wildlife Department at the State University of New York, has come up with a solution.

Noting that bluebirds frequently roost in nestboxes in the winter, he has collected the droppings from the floor of the boxes when he cleans them in the spring. He then plants the droppings "in small trays that are commonly used for rearing garden plants from seed for transplanting." Once the seeds germinate, he plants them in his garden, since the plants that germinate are the ones that bluebirds have chosen for winter foods. He finds that he needs to place cages around the young seedlings, because deer love the succulent and tender new growth. When the plants mature, not only bluebirds, but numerous other birds will also consume the fruit. He had tried tilling an area of his yard and sowing the droppings directly into the ground, but grasses and wildflowers quickly reinvaded the area, and not a single fruited plant developed from the site.

Dr. Berner says, "I would encourage others to collect, not discard, droppings found in your nestboxes after the winter. Once you determine the plants that bluebirds are surviving on during the winter, you can encourage these plants in your own yard. This will help you support bluebird winter survival and increase spring vigor while attracting bluebirds to your neighborhood for observation."

## Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Western Bluebirds Banded and Recaptured

	Banded Nestlings	Banded Adults	Total Banded	Live Recoveries	Dead Recoveries	Total Recoveries
1988	106	2	108	0	0	0
1989	27	3	30	0	0	0
1990	94	15	109	0	3	3
1991	117	11	128	1	3	4
1992	243	40	283	20	2	22
1993	242	23	265	29	4	33
1994	363	30	393	47	4	51
1995	493	26	519	32	5	37
1996	611	44	655	57	1	58
1997	939	53	992	83	7	90
1998	1,198	94	1,292	146	14	160
1999	1,295	104	1,399	238	37	275
2000	1,627	107	1,734	360	27	387
2001	1,952	97	2,049	379	51	430
2002	1,356	94	1,450	293	76	369
2003	1,837	127	1,964	378	28	406
2004	2,108	117	2,225	490	22	512
2005	2,048	143	2,191	414	42	456
2006*	2,099	143	2,242	453	184	637

\* Incomplete numbers

### Education Coordinator Needed!

Do you have skills in organizing a corps of speakers and speaking to groups about Western Bluebirds? Currently, we have a vacancy in the very important position of Education Coordinator. Please contact PBRP President, Dave Flaming, if you would like to help our project and bluebirds in this very special way. Any of us who have explained bluebirds to our friends and relatives know how receptive the general public is to bluebird information. Speaking to a group is both rewarding and fun. And we already have some very talented speakers within our group, just waiting to be organized!!!



*Photo by Nancy Fraser*

## The One Latte Banding

*By Nancy Fraser, Monitor and Bander*

This very successful nest box (can you pick it out?) is mounted on a tree with drooping, spreading branches, set in a rural field. This year, the field wasn't mowed at all until after the bluebirds fledged. On banding day, I was totally unsuccessful in capturing the adults to record their band numbers. I laid plans to visit again in a few days to repeat my attempts.

I brought my basket this time, and carefully packed not only the items I would need for capturing and banding the adult pair, but a few items to keep myself occupied while I waited them out. I had my manicure kit, a book, some monitoring paperwork to complete, and an extra hot latte (this was still May). I set up the trap and settled in to watch and perhaps to work on my projects. As I waited, I noticed that the alpaca herd in the next field, just on the other side of the fence from the tree, was making its peculiar snorting sounds . . . rather frequently. I was wondering if they were sensing my presence hidden in the grass. Then I realized . . . they were actually passing gas!!!

Bemused, I continued to work on my latte, and completed two nest box histories, while

waiting for the bluebird pair to enter the trap and allow me to record their band numbers. By the time the latte cup was empty, I had captured both birds. I packed up and left the area, with mission accomplished and a new piece of information about the alpacas who own the fields in which several of my monitor route bluebird boxes are located.



## Photo Caption Contest!

Can you help us come up with a caption for this photo? Make up your own one-line caption, and send it to our newsletter editor at: [twinkletoes2400@msn.com](mailto:twinkletoes2400@msn.com).

Submissions will be ranked by our Board, and the top three winners (and their captions) will be announced in the PBRP Spring 2007 newsletter.

## Got worms?



*Photo by Rebecca Dandois, used with permission*



*Photo by Jack Carter*

### **Blue Sky Day** *by Jack Carter, Monitor*

It's one of those perfect August days. From this backyard on Arndt Road the view is an expanse of sweet corn tassels under a clear, dark blue sky. It's no wonder Mrs. Janie Shannon enjoyed her years looking out over these fields - and the bluebirds that nested in Prescott nest boxes along her back fence. When Mrs. Shannon moved to nearby Charbonneau a couple of years ago, Sarah, her golden retriever, stayed behind to look after the place. And PBRP continued to monitor her nest boxes. Today, Sarah and I sit under a big holly tree for half an hour, waiting on the bluebirds to return to their nest box. The pair's second clutch chicks, almost two weeks old, are alert and content, so I figure the parents are out for a long forage. Still, it's the first time the parents haven't appeared within a few minutes, usually as soon as I walk in the gate. Today, the bluebirds never show.

The Shannon pair's first clutch of four chicks fledged in mid-June. Not long afterwards, two of the fledglings made several appearances with their parents on top of the nest box, typical bossy kids. Two days after my long sit with Sarah I'm relieved to see the female at the nest box, although she's alone, and mostly ignores a few meal worms I put out. But as before, the chicks seem fat and happy.

On my next round I'm glad to see a pair of bluebirds there, but my relief is short-lived. At first I think there are two females, then through my binoculars I see the bird feeding the chicks has some bright blue on its rump. I call Lauri Kunzman, my bander, and ask whether males ever go through quick bright-to-dull plumage changes. She stops by the next day, and recognizes right away that the male feeding the chicks is a fledgling from the first clutch, a possibility I hadn't considered since I hadn't seen the first clutch fledglings in a few weeks.

During the next week I get a kick out of it every time I check on the Shannon nest box and watch the fledgling/step-dad carry on like an old pro. After all, this fellow is just 8 weeks old himself. The female's behavior is different too; she stays a short distance away until the fledgling has fed the clutch, as if to encourage his commitment to the chicks, and even then just pokes her head in the box briefly.

As the fledge date for the second clutch approaches, we wonder whether the two-month old step-dad will know when (and how) to coax the chicks out of the box. On the expected date, nobody fledges. The step-dad is single-minded in his determination to feed hungry chicks. On the next day I watch the box from a distance. At least one chick has fledged and is hidden in a locust tree about 75 feet away, the step-dad carrying a grasshopper into the dense leaf cover. Twice, a chick inside the box jumps up to perch in the nest box hole, ready to fly, only to have the female shoo it back into the box, as if to say, "Wait until your step-dad is ready for you." Pretty good teamwork, I'd say.

By the next day, all four chicks have successfully fledged, the nest left tidy and perfectly clean. I leave Mrs. Shannon's yard hoping that wherever the step-dad is, he's in the middle of Introductory Bug-hunting lessons. What happened to the first male is a mystery. But sometimes, as with this second clutch, all wasn't lost. It's been another blue-sky day.



Photo by Jack Carter



Photo by Chuck Taber, landowner and reader

## Plant Native!

There are many benefits to planting native plants in your yard, either exclusively, or in addition to plants that may already be established. One huge benefit of native plants is that they provide habitat for songbirds and other animals. Unfortunately, habitat loss has resulted in declining numbers of songbirds and other species. Help to replace that habitat by introducing native plants into your landscape!

Looking for a native plant nursery? Here are a few websites to help get you started:

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

[www.tardigrade.org/natives/nurseries.html](http://www.tardigrade.org/natives/nurseries.html)

[www.npsoregon.org/index.htm](http://www.npsoregon.org/index.htm)



Photo by Chuck Taber, landowner and reader



*Photo by Nancy Fraser*

## Bluebirds with Minds of Their Own

*By Nancy Fraser*

A good friend of mine relocated from a large property in the country outside Oregon City to a home in a modest-sized development in town. The new home has a very small lot, adjacent to a schoolyard, compared to the acres surrounding her former home with its 360 degree covered porch overlooking the fields and gardens. She always hoped and dreamed of having bluebirds in the country, but the birds never found their way to that lovely habitat.

The new home had a well-used yard (some might say abused), and she (a talented and committed gardener) had just started the process of removing what few plants had survived and overgrown, and creating a haven for new, specially chosen plants, and birds. Imagine her disappointment to find house sparrows and crows were the most visible wildlife sharing her new home!

One morning, she called me excitedly to report that there were bluebirds in her yard. I immediately packed up a Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project nest box and supplies to install it, and motored over to her home, where I too saw the bluebirds. We installed the box and hoped that the birds would find it to their liking. On questioning some of

the neighbors, she found that they had seen bluebirds as well. We wondered; some folk name every bird that is blue as a “bluebird”. Many turn out to be Western Scrub Jays. (If you are lucky, sometimes they turn out to be Lazuli Buntings!!!)

Amazingly, the overwhelming neighborhood population of house sparrows did not take the bluebird box we installed. Surprisingly, to me, the bluebirds chose to nest in one of the swallow birdhouses my friend had brought from her old home and installed on posts high above the six foot common fence with a neighbor. The female had to shimmy a bit to fit into the nest hole, and despite this raised a successful first clutch, with the chicks also managing to use the small nest hole. When my friend had to leave for a long-planned overseas trip, her granddaughter house-sat both my friend’s home and the bluebird guests. The young fledged before my friend returned from her trip. Soon, there were bluebird adults and fledglings happily enjoying the morning meal worm treat my friend left for them, along with the dish of water for bathing and drinking. The female started building a second nest in the same swallow box.



*Photo by Nancy Fraser*

I now started receiving bulletins from my friend about the number of bluebirds coming to her feeding station and water source, and the number of birds feeding the new



nestlings in the box--the female, the male, and an apparent “uncle”. First clutch fledglings were continuing to hang about as well. Yesterday, she told me that there were as many as twelve birds coming for mealworms, and that some had both speckled breasts and downy feather outlines. I assumed that the young had fledged from the box, and she had various ages of hatch year birds visiting. She told me, no, that the chicks were still in the box because feeding was still going on and she could hear the nestlings. Because the nest box is not set up for monitoring, there is no way to be sure when the expected fledge date might be.

At 6:30 this morning I left my house to visit all of this activity. We sipped our coffee and placed the morning mealworm allotment in the tray. A single fledgling and the female were waiting on the arbor for the mealworms. The female immediately loaded up with a mouthful of mealworms and went to the box to feed. She made several more trips, and then took off to do some foraging out in the open fields. We continued to see fledglings of two different stages of maturity checking out the feeder tray and staying about the yard and adjacent trees. One adult male was seen briefly. There are two possibilities (probably more) for the mix of bluebirds we saw. One would be that there is at least one other active bluebird nest in the area, accounting for the younger fledglings. The other might be that some of the chicks in my friend’s swallow box have fledged, and that the female is continuing to feed chicks that haven’t quite been persuaded to leave the box.

When the activity of the adults suggested that fledging was complete, together we took down these boxes, and took them apart to clean and to investigate the size of the nest hole and the feasibility of modifying them to make it possible to monitor

activities. We found it would be impossible to monitor them, and that, surprisingly, the nest hole opening was just right for bluebirds. These boxes were built for my friend by Millie, a gardening buddy and friend. She used leftover wood from her construction of a chapel honoring her grandparents. Sited in her beautiful home garden, these boxes were coveted and ordered by garden folks across the U.S. Millie, too, always wanted bluebirds to nest, but this never happened in the boxes on her property.

Next Spring, when my friend’s yard is transformed from “deck + dirt” to the beautiful garden she has planned, we will re-install a Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project box. And we will leave the little boxes in place, too. Bluebirds all over our area are using both the nest boxes we provide, and cavities, be they other boxes or natural cavities, and all of these provide a place for Western Bluebirds to nest and raise young.



*Photo by Chuck Taber, landowner and reader*



Photo by Dot Carson

## I Don't Want to be a Bluebird Mom!

*By Dot Carson, landowner and reader*

After the 2006 bluebird nesting season, I can see that I don't want to come back as a bluebird mom (or an Emperor penguin mom for that matter).

From March until late August there were three adult bluebirds present in our yard. The father blue was the same father from last year. The second male was one of last year's chicks banded at our box as a nestling. This 'uncle' was a stalwart helper this year. The female was new to our yard (banded last year on lower Ladd Hill Road) and I wondered what fate last year's female had met.

Our little one year old female made three nests. The first nest had eight bluebird eggs

in it much to my joy and excitement. I was so happy only to be terribly disappointed when, for no apparent reason, the parents abruptly stopped going into the nest. Our support person, Lauri Kunzman (I must have emailed her thirty questions between March and August) thought that perhaps wasps had invaded the nest. Upon inspection that proved not to be the case. Reluctantly, we pulled the eight cold eggs from the nest. Our neighbor sprayed his whole field with an herbicide on a somewhat windy day just before the bluebirds stopped going into the nest. Was a chemical the culprit?

On the very day Lauri said, "Let's go ahead and pull the eggs," she also suggested, "Let's go look in the other box," which we have way down the fence line. I gloomily agreed but wasn't hopeful since I'd just looked in it a few days prior. When we

looked, there was a new nest with three bluebird eggs in it! So much can happen in so few days! Now I was elated after just being dejected.

But once again I was to have a roller coaster experience, because just a day or two after we discovered the new bluebird nest, I saw with my own two eyes that swallows were entering this nest box. I thought that they had stolen the nest away from the bluebirds (swallows had nested in this particular box last year) and was totally distraught. Once again I emailed Lauri with dire concerns. She calmed me down and said to give the bluebirds a chance to defend their territory. To cut to the chase, the bluebirds prevailed and this hardworking Mom laid four more eggs for a total of seven in this nest. Right on schedule all seven eggs hatched. Twenty one days later all seven nestlings fledged! It was so much fun for me to see the three adults fly from the meal worm station into the huge Empress of China tree on our fence line. I knew the fledglings were hiding there, but even with my Swarovski binoculars, I could never see them.

It might be interesting to know that at banding time Lauri changed out this very soggy dirty nest. Seven nestlings create a lot of 'sogginess' and these seven chicks were growing up in an old small nesting box. Very cramped! All seven flourished, helped along by the three adults feeding them.

I wondered if the female would nest again after having already laid fifteen eggs, and -- amazingly to me -- she did! Seemingly, at the same time that she and the two males were stuffing worms into the mouths of the seven chicks, she was also preparing her third nest of the season.

With ten bluebirds now convening for meal worms, I was in bluebird heaven. Every day

was a treat for me, binoculars and camera in hand. I had added a mister to the birdbath near the feeding station and the bluebirds delighted in bathing and standing head first with mouths open to the mist.

Seven eggs again appeared for clutch number three. Extreme heat took its toll and only four of the seven eggs hatched. We had tried to fool Mother Nature by putting up a wood shield against the heat and that is probably what saved the four who did hatch. Neighbor Ed Hepp made the shield, as well as the nesting boxes and a unique feeding station.

What a flurry of bluebirds there was now! I added an extra feeding station to accommodate all of them. Although there were fourteen to begin with, one bluebird must have been hawk bait as I could only count thirteen birds for many days. The second clutch was now helping the three adults to feed the third clutch. The birds would sit in the birch trees near the food and water, or sit in a line on the roof. At times they would follow me and flutter overhead as I worked in the garden. I felt very blessed. Blessed and glad that *I* had not just built three homes, laid twenty-two eggs, and fed and cared for all those chicks. Wherever she is now, I hope that female (#2201-64252) is enjoying a truly deserved rest and recuperation. And most of all, I hope that she comes back here next year.





*Photo taken on banding day by landowner and reader, Chuck Taber*

## Diary of a New Monitor

*By Abby Jaworski, Monitor*

**February/March:** My experience in bluebird monitoring started in February of 2006, when I saw a notice for the PBRP volunteer orientation. “What fun!”, I thought, and headed off to Champoeg for the meeting. The meeting was informative and fun, and at the conclusion, I signed up to become a volunteer monitor, not fully knowing what I was getting myself into, but excited about the experience.

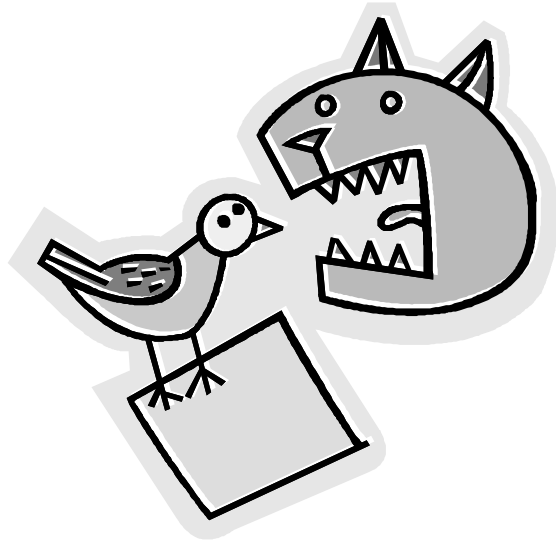
My bander took me on my route in early March, and patiently explained what I would be doing and how. We even saw a bluebird! “This is going to be a lot of fun!”, I thought, although I had to admit concern about the burro that took an instant dislike to me... that burro lives in the field where one of my boxes is located.

**April:** I’ve decided that monitoring bluebird boxes is no longer fun... instead, it’s a cold, wet, miserable experience. Why did I sign up for this?

**May:** The weather has gotten warmer, and bluebird monitoring is fun again. A bunch of the birds on my route have started nesting, and chicks are starting to hatch. Unfortunately, in late May, a cold front came through, and many of the nestlings in my boxes died. After cleaning out many failed nesting attempts, I went home and cried.

**June/July:** Nesting season is in full swing. Many of the bluebirds with failed nests have rebuilt, and their nestlings (and others) are hatching, fledging, and helping to raise new broods. The joy of seeing those small bluebirds in the boxes and seeing the parents twitter as I approach makes me smile each week. I love seeing “my” bluebirds, talking to the wonderful landowners about the birds, and watching as the nestlings grow.

**August:** Nesting season is winding down. Only one box still has nestlings in it, and they will fledge by the end of the month. This has been quite an experience, and one I will remember with both tears and laughter.



## Keeping Cats Indoors... Isn't Just For Birds!

*By Becky Weaber, Summer 2006 Bluebird Trails and Tales, Reprinted with permission*

Today's cat owners face an important decision: "Should I keep my cat indoors?" For your cat's sake, and that of the birds and other wildlife in your neighborhood, the answer to that question should be "yes"!

Today, birds and other wildlife face more obstacles to their survival than ever before. Wildlife habitats are destroyed and degraded every day, and many species are declining as a result. Even the impacts of natural predators on their prey is changing based on how humans are altering the natural environment. And the presence of an unnatural predator – the domestic cat – is having an impact as well.

Scientists estimate that cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year and three times as many small mammals. Most birds killed by cats are members of relatively common species, like the Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco; others are rare and endangered – the California Least Tern, Piping Plover, Western Snowy Plover and California Gnatcatcher. Regardless of the status of the species, each wild animal

suffers when captured by a cat. By letting our cats outside, we – perhaps without intent – place a higher value on the freedom of our pet than on the life of that cardinal, that chickadee or that chipmunk she kills.

Cats cannot be blamed for killing wildlife. It is the responsibility of cat owners to ensure that their cats are safely indoors. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), American Humane Association (AHA), and other groups are working with the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) on "Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats." Through this campaign, we will educate and encourage cat owners to protect cats, birds and other wildlife by keeping cats indoors.

### Truths About Cats and Birds

We all know that cats don't have nine lives, but there are three other myths about cat predation we'd like to dispel.

-“Belled” cats do kill wildlife. Cats with bells on their collars can learn to stalk their prey silently. Even if they don't, wild animals do not necessarily associate the ringing of a bell with danger.

-Even well-fed cats kill wildlife. The urge to hunt and the urge to eat are controlled by different portions of the cat's brain.

-Once caught by a cat, few birds survive, even if they appear to have escaped. Infection from the cat's teeth or claws or the stress of capture usually results in death.

For more information on topics such as outdoor enclosures for cats, acclimating your cat to indoor life, and the Cats Indoors! campaign, please visit: [www.abcbirds.org/cats/](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/).



## Using Monofilament Line to “Spook” House Sparrows

*By Becky Weaber, Summer 2006 Bluebird Trails and Tales,  
Reprinted with permission*

### What Is It?

Using monofilament line or fishing line to deter house sparrows is an experimental technique in the world of bluebirding. Using this method has been very successful for some bluebirders. If you are having a problem with house sparrows overtaking your nest box, this could be a method that may work for you. Using 6 lb. monofilament line, attach it on either side of the entrance hole from roof to the bottom of the box. It should be 1 ¾ inches to 2 inches apart with the hole in the center.

### Why This May Work

Bluebirds and tree swallows are insect eaters, and thus have excellent eyesight. House sparrows are mainly seed eaters and lack the great vision that bluebirds and tree swallows have. Therefore, it is thought that bluebirds and swallows can see the monofilament line in place and can fold their wings down accordingly, while sparrows cannot easily see the line and have difficulty entering the nest box. House sparrows usually enter an entrance hole with their wings spread, to slow their speed down to enter the hole. Bluebirds and swallows do not need to slow their speed at the entrance hole, with their wings already folded, they swoop right in. A 6 lb. line is recommended, because if the line is too thick, the sparrows have a greater chance of seeing the line and would not be as “spooked” by it when flying into the hole.

### A Short Term Solution?

Methods that do not eliminate the house sparrow are called passive control. Passive control methods are short term control, and are simply buying time. Aggressive control of house sparrows (trapping and eliminating them) is the best long term solution. For some people, eliminating a house sparrow is hard for them to do or they may simply not be comfortable with the idea. Monofilament line could be an option for them. All “sparrow spooker” ideas work only until the sparrow gets used to or adapts to the idea. While leaving the line on nest boxes all year round has been working for many people, removing it after the nesting season is over and reapplying the line before it begins may keep the sparrows from figuring out how it all works. Monofilament line appears to be most successful when attached to the box before the male house sparrow has chosen the box and formed a bond with it. If he has bonded with the box, he may tolerate it. Something else to keep in mind when deciding to try this method is the fact that there is a risk that nestlings could become entangled in the line as they leave the nest box. There is a greater chance of this happening when the line has become loose or ripped, but it can occur with tight line also. One way to cut down on the nestlings tangling themselves up in the line is to remove the line before fledglings leave the box, which is usually 18-21 days.

Please keep in mind that disturbing the box after 12 to 13 days increases the risk of **premature fledging**. Premature fledging is very dangerous to nestlings and can result in death. If you decide to remove the line from the box, please use extreme caution so as not to disturb the nestlings inside the box. Again, the box should not be opened after they are 13 days old. That is why it is very

important to know how old your nestlings are by regularly monitoring your box.

There are some birders that also feel that the line is best applied after the bluebirds (or tree swallows) have made a nest and have an attachment to the box and when there is a danger of house sparrow attacks on the box. Timid bluebirds may be nervous to enter a box with the line attached, but would accept it after they have a bond with the box. If you decide to add the line after, it may be a good idea to add a second box without the line that would keep the house sparrows busy. You could keep removing the eggs from the house sparrow nest, shaking the eggs violently to make them infertile, and putting them back into the nest and finally cleaning out the whole box after the bluebird nestlings fledge their nest.

If you have no major problems with house sparrows, you can simply leave the boxes as they are. For instance, if you have your boxes in the middle of a clear field with no issues, it is best to leave the boxes alone. The monofilament line should not be used as added insurance unless there is an ongoing problem with house sparrows.

### **Proper Use to Avoid Danger to Birds**

Make sure the line *always* stays tight by checking on it every week or more often in windy or harsh weather. The line can deteriorate in bad weather and sunlight. Make sure the screws or eye hooks used to hold the line in place are always tight and secure. There is a chance that bluebirds and swallows could become entangled in loose or ripped line.

Please make sure to dispose of monofilament line correctly. Cut it up into tiny pieces or better yet, cut in small pieces and throw it away in a trash can. **Fishing**

**line can be dangerous to wildlife if left in large pieces on the ground, as animals and birds can become entangled in it.**

We would like to make you fully aware of both positive and negative impacts of the method so that you can make an educated determination on trying it. It is recommended that if a cavity nesting bird cannot nest successfully in a nest box because of constant house sparrow occupancy, that you take the box down and relocate it where house sparrows are less prevalent.

### **Thank You to our Donors!**

The Fall Newsletter contains an envelope for your use in making a donation to help sustain the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project's volunteer efforts to provide cavity nesting space for Western Bluebirds in and around the North Willamette Valley.

While most Bluebird organizations rely on memberships/dues to provide their funding, in our area we are very fortunate to enjoy volunteer donations from all of our generous donors. We are rich in our bluebird community with a diversity of volunteers, homeowners, supporters, and sponsors, who represent a spectrum of generations (including young folks), "habitat", and job and family skills. In this way, the Northern Willamette Valley, and the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project, are strong and unique. Thank you again for your support!



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