



Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter

Fall 2010

An affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

President's Perspectives

By Nancy Fraser



What a roller coaster of a season this was in terms of the weather and its impact on the successful survival and breeding of wildlife, crops, and weeds. The latter seem to have been the most successful.

Although a preliminary review of nesting results in my banding area shows significant losses of early broods, in other locations the fledging numbers don't look too bad. On my little patches near Sherwood/Dundee, there was a significantly higher loss of adult birds than in previous seasons. My bias is that this was related directly or indirectly to the lack of available food for the adult birds and for their young during the first half of the nesting season. The impact of this season on the success of the next has yet to be determined. What I do know is that you, our volunteers, landowners, and supporters, will continue to invest amazing energy and resources into the sustained maintenance

of the bluebird population. On behalf of the wildlife and your fellow volunteers and supporters, all of us bluebird lovers, I thank you.

It seems just a short time since our last election of our Board of Directors. Late this year I will be appointing a Nominating Committee to identify a slate of volunteers who would be willing to serve in this capacity. Please be flattered and strongly consider agreeing to help our project by becoming a member of our Board if you are approached by one of the Nominating Committee members.

Fall is also the time that both banding and monitoring summary reports for the season are due. And it is the time to take advantage of the beautiful weather to clean and spruce up nestboxes on your trail/property. Data collected and observations made can be used to identify possible relocations or changes to nestboxes to increase nesting opportunities. Can you reduce the density of boxes to improve the likelihood of BLUEBIRDS nesting rather than other species?

Being a transplanted (migrant) Midwesterner, I relish the fall of the year. This was a stressful season, and I find that the transition in weather and the countryside are especially welcome. I hope that all of you are enjoying this too!

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

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Banders: Caroline Brandt, Stephen Brandt, Bob Burbank, Lyn Burniston, Dave Flaming, Nancy Fraser, Carole Hallett, Bunny Hirtzel, Lauri Kunzman, Zenobia Lapeyre, Brenda McGowan, Fred Robinson, Karen Russell, Dan Sherman, Onalee Wasserburger

Assistants to Banders in 2010:

Carol Krueger, Barbara Manghelli, Scott Morrison,
Dave Sewell

Help Our Volunteers to Help the Bluebirds

Our Board regularly evaluates expenses to use your donated funds in the very best way. This newsletter is critically important to disseminate information, and also consumes more than 70% of our annual supporting donations. This year we can no longer support the cost of a printed newsletter with full color photos. We encourage everyone on our mailing to receive our newsletter via E mail notification to our web site, rather than a mailed, printed copy. You will see the photos in color at the web site. Thank you for your support of the Western Bluebird. -*The PBRP Volunteer Team*

Did you know? At the end of nesting season, our project donates remaining mealworms to the Audubon Portland Wildlife Care Center!

2011 Spring New and Returning Monitors' Workshop

Each spring we hold an information workshop to begin the orientation and training process for potential new monitors in our project. Although we always hope that new volunteers will allow us to expand our program or re-establish nestbox routes that have been left unmanned due to insufficient monitors, in reality we maintain status quo more often than not. The workshop will be at the Champoeg State Heritage Area Visitors' Center on Saturday, February 26, 2011, from 9am to 12pm. There will be no separate afternoon session. The Board is taking a new approach by combining interested new volunteers with returning volunteers, then holding a detailed training session for new volunteers a few weeks later. This will be the only opportunity to pick up your 2011 monitor and bander packets at this central location and to hear highlights of any new information about the upcoming season. If you have someone in mind that might be interested in volunteering, or has expressed an interest to you, please alert them to this date! Please plan to attend in order to share your impressions and experiences monitoring bluebirds with interested new potential volunteers.

Bluebirds and Pelleted Fertilizers

-By Karen Russell, Monitor and Bander

I had some experiences this season that have caused me to be concerned about the possible danger of using pellet fertilizers in areas where bluebird nestboxes are placed. I wanted to share this information with banders, monitors, and property owners.

In my experience, under certain circumstances this fertilizer can result in the death of bluebirds. In a previous season, adult bluebirds were seen taking fertilizer pellets into a nestbox, and presumably were feeding them to nestlings. The adult bluebirds probably ate some pellets also. Later, all the birds (adults and nestlings) were found dead in the nestbox. My investigations found pelleted material in their stomachs.



This season, on a property with multiple active bluebird nestboxes for 10 years, there were unexplained deaths of nestlings and adults in the nestboxes. This was not the pattern in the numerous broods produced in other nestboxes on my route in this same area. I talked to the property owner, and he identified seeing (kicking it as he walked) pelleted fertilizer. He also described mowing shorter than usual, with the pellets more visible. Recalling the previous incident and considering this unusual pattern of deaths in multiple boxes on this property raised my suspicion about the birds' mistaken use of the pellets as food items for their brood and themselves.

If pellet fertilizers are used on yards, gardens, crops, et cetera, bluebirds may mistake it for food or insects (grubs, et cetera), and feed their nestlings the pellets, as well as eat pellets themselves. It could be fatal to all of them. The birds are especially

vulnerable during the spring when weather is poor, and insects are not plentiful.

Pellet fertilizer must be watered well immediately to dissolve it, or must be worked into the soil so it is not visible to the birds. These practices are precautions but could prevent deaths of bluebirds. Pellet fertilizer use belongs on the list of possible (and preventable) risks to bluebird survival and nesting success when our volunteers are investigating losses.

I suggest banders and monitors might inquire if property owners use pellet fertilizers, especially if there is an unusual pattern of bluebird loss that is not consistent with any other known cause and not typical of the losses being experienced elsewhere on your routes at the same time.

If they do use pellets, ask about their method of application and watering, or working it into the soil. Explain your concerns for the bluebirds, and then an appropriate decision can be made as to whether nestboxes should be relocated.

Property owners love and enjoy the bluebirds as much as we volunteers do. They are always willing to help in any way they can. This is appreciated very much by banders and monitors! We are working together for the bluebirds' continued recovery from adverse changes in our environment by restoring their nesting habitat. The rewards are so great when we work together to enhance bluebird success! Our project, property owners, and volunteers are making a difference!

Editor's Note: If you have a moment, check out Metro's guide to sustainable living at: oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=24199. There are some great tips on natural gardening, green cleaning, and nature-friendly home improvement, along with lots of other information!



Champoege State Heritage Area Bluebird Day

On Saturday, June 19, Champoege Heritage Area and the Friends of Champoege, along with a number of our volunteers, hosted the annual Bluebird Day special event. Despite threatening weather, more than 250 visitors enjoyed viewing bluebirds at their nestbox, watching bluebird videos with our volunteers in attendance to interpret and answer questions, building a chickadee nestbox to take home, and participating in a bluebird-related Junior Ranger program. Thank you to Champoege volunteers and staff, the Friends, and to all of our wonderful volunteers who made the time to come out and help

with the event in the middle of the bluebird nesting season. Next year's Bluebird Day will be the 3rd Saturday of June. A sign up list for volunteers to come help celebrate will be out at our Spring Workshop on February 26, 2011. Come join the party!!

Champoege Spring Break Day Camp

-By Nelda Skidmore, Monitor

My husband and I monitor the bluebird nesting boxes at Champoege State Heritage Area. In response to a request from Janie Malloy and Marilyn Godfrey of the Friends of Historic Champoege, our bluebird bander Lauri Kunzman asked us to give a presentation on bluebirds at their Spring Break Day Camp. The goal of the camp was to give the children an opportunity to experience the cultural and natural history of Champoege; and to explore the park and discover how they could protect and preserve it.

On the March morning when we gave our presentation, our audience was 13 children grades K-7. We showed a short film on bluebirds that was filmed by OPB as part of their Oregon Field Guide television series. We then spoke about how to identify Western Bluebirds, the challenges they face from habitat destruction and predators, their life cycle, and our role as bluebird monitors.

The children were very attentive and asked some great questions like "If the eggs are laid on different days but they all hatch at the same time are the baby birds at different developmental levels?" And, "Do they always return to the same box?" Janie and Marilyn had a very good rapport with the children. They helped us make sure the presentation ran smoothly, was integrated with the rest of the camp activities/presentations, and was meaningful to the children.

After the film and presentation we adjourned outside to watch several bluebirds checking out some nesting boxes near the visitor center. The children helped to put some mealworms in a feeder tray to attract the bluebirds. Using binoculars, the children became quite proficient at spotting the bluebirds and identifying the males and females.

It was a fun and rewarding experience for us. We appreciated the opportunity to show off some of the bluebirds at Champoege to hopefully some future birders.



PBRP Annual Meeting and Season's Fall Wrap-Up

Our Annual Meeting was held at Champoeg State Heritage Area Pavilion on Saturday, September 18. Dan Sherman, one of our volunteers, spoke to us about banding birds of prey, and his experience as a bander with this population of birds.

Last year Dr. Powers told us about hummingbird banding. Both these speakers have provided us with information to compare and contrast with the Western Bluebirds that are the focus of our project.



After the Annual Meeting and Dan's talk, we shared together our experiences during the difficult nesting season just completed. Then, the Board of Directors provided a potluck picnic to express their appreciation to our volunteers for all their dedication and hard work.

Donations Envelope

Please take a moment to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to sustain Western Bluebirds. Our project is run entirely by volunteers, from the Officers and Board, to the REALLY important volunteer Monitors and Banders in the field, who make a difference for the bluebirds. We are also grateful for the volunteer work done to provide and maintain our website, data base, newsletter, and nestbox supplies. There are no membership fees or costs associated with becoming a part of our recovery project and receiving the newsletter. All our costs are borne by contributions. Folded inside this publication you will find a donation envelope, which we hope you will use to help us to help the bluebirds. *—Thank you from the volunteers of the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project*

Bluebird Diet Changes?

Early this spring, bluebirds have been reported approaching bird feeders and eating seeds. The seeds seem to have been shelled sunflower seeds, and the bluebirds have been coming to the feeders consistently. This has been reported from as far away as Corvallis and as close as Tualatin. Reports have come from five or six different areas.

This is the first time that we are aware of bluebirds eating seeds. If you have personally witnessed this behavior, please report it to Pat Johnston, 503-246-1337, or email pjoh123@msn.com. Please note exactly what kind of seed the birds are eating, which months it was noted, and the frequency with which they approached the feeders. Anything else that was noted would be helpful, too.

Important Dates

Feb 26, 2011

Spring New Monitors' Workshop

Feb 2011 (TBA)

Newsletter submission deadline

Spring 2011 (TBA)

Banders' Meeting

June 18, 2011

Bluebird Day at Champoeg

September 17, 2011

Annual Meeting/Volunteer Appreciation/Election of Board

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