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## PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

Post Office Box 1469 | Sherwood, Oregon 97140 | [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com)

### Newsletter ~ Fall 2012

#### The President's Nest Box

by Dave Flaming

This past spring I attended a showing of the movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Whenever there was a problem at this old and run-down hotel, manager Sonny Kapoor, played by Actor Dev Patel, responded with "everything will be okay in the end, if it's not okay, it's not the end."

"everything will be okay in the end.  
if it's not okay, it's not the end."  
—unknown

Everything was not okay this past Bluebird season. All of us experienced far too many clutch failures and adult deaths. This June was the 4th wettest in the 117 years of record keeping. It was preceded with June of 2011 being the 2nd wettest on record. As we know, wet and cold weather prohibits insects, the vital food source for breeding Bluebirds as well as numerous other birds.

"if it's not okay, it's not the end" aptly defines who we are as volunteers for PBRP. We do not give up, but just work a little harder to improve the lives of our Bluebirds. My gratitude goes out to all the homeowners in our project, along with the many monitors and banders who have worked extra hard this season, mitigating our losses.

By the way, I highly recommend seeing *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.

#### 2013 Important Upcoming Dates!

February 23	Spring Workshop
April - August	2013 Nesting Season & Monitoring
September	Annual Meeting. Date TBA



Photos courtesy of Zenobia Lapeyre

## Release of a Saw Whet Owl and Discovery of a Bluebird Nestbox

*Submitted by Nancy Fraser*

It is late March. For the previous two days it has snowed in the hills outside Portland, and yesterday in the city itself. Today I was asked to release a Northern Saw Whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*) that had been in rehabilitation at the Audubon Portland Wildlife Care Center, after having been hit by a car weeks ago. I called another volunteer from our project, Zenobia Lapeyre, to witness and photograph the event . . . and share in the joy of returning a bird to the wild.

Audubon Care Center volunteers are sometimes asked to release rehabilitated wildlife at a location near where they were found. This owl was to be released in the Bethany area west of Portland. As we drove with the owl in its carrier in the back of my car, we looked about for suitable wooded habitat with nearby fields. I didn't want to release it too close to the road where it had been injured, nor did I want to trespass on private property. After a few sorties on nearby roads, I parked at a church adjoining a small pioneer cemetery.



*Cemetery Entrance*

We walked uphill into the small, wooded space. In addition to low growing trees and shrubs, there was a grove of mature firs within about 1000 feet. The owl was produced out of the carrier, and stood for a moment on my hand. It remained, seeming to drink in the open space, the country sounds of birds, roosters, and yes, even automobiles, making its owlish head rotations. Seemingly satisfied, the bird flapped its wings, and flew to a dense fruit tree, where it perched and looked about. As we waited to see if it was making the transition into the natural world from the well-intentioned captivity in the rehabilitation hospital, we noticed that there was a bluebird nestbox mounted on a post just outside the cemetery boundary...564F401. This location has no recent history of bluebird nesting activity, but it made a connection for me between PBRP's bluebird conservation field activities and the rehabilitation efforts of the Audubon Society of Portland.

Saw Whet Owl habitat includes all types of woodlands. These owls can be found roosting in winter in small, dense conifer trees, sometimes even in parks and gardens. Its defense upon discovery is to sit still and not fly, leading people to mistakenly perceive them as "tame." This owl hunts from a perch at night, and primarily takes deer mice. It may also take other rodents, large insects, and occasionally small birds. At 7-8 inches long and weighing 2-5 ounces, this small owl with yellow eyes and soft brown plumage is able to take prey that matches its own size. Its wing span is 16-19 inches. The owl is a secondary cavity nester, and 4-10 eggs are incubated for 26 -29 days. The young are born totally helpless, with soft fluffy down and closed eyes. The female leaves the nest when the youngest nestling is about 18 days old to roost elsewhere. The male will continue to feed the young, even after the female is gone, for at least

a month after fledging. Fledging occurs after 27-34 days in the nest. The average life span is 4-5 years.

*Photos courtesy of  
Zenobia Lapeyre*



*Saw Whet Owl in hospital cage at Audubon*

### Save this 2013 Date

#### Spring Workshop for New & Returning Volunteers

New volunteers are needed & invited to the February 23, 2013 meeting. Current volunteers are invited to come pick up their nesting season packets and meet with fellow volunteers and new volunteers to "Talk Bluebird"!

9:30 am to Noon

Champoeg State Heritage Area Visitors' Center

Please register at our website [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com)

*See You There!!*

## Oren Wright "Bob" Ballou

September 10, 1933 – September 13, 2011

*By Ann Haase, one of Bob's neighbors*

Bob served faithfully and enthusiastically as our neighborhood bluebird restoration patriarch for over 10 years. He started the project here, encouraging us all to become involved. He built the first houses for all 8 neighbors. He took charge! Very faithful in morning mealworm delivery, Bob walked the road rain or shine, whistling to the birds and carrying his small bag of mealworms in his shirt pocket. He monitored all the pairs carefully, documenting and communicating with PBRP volunteers on the number of eggs laid in each box, when they hatched, when they were of an age for banding, and when they fledged. He even arranged neighborhood gatherings around the scheduled bandings. A number of the boxes have produced two clutches every year. He monitored another box up the road, out of our neighborhood. Those birds came back each year. This was the first year they weren't there and Bob wasn't either.

Bob knew when the first bluebird arrived on territory in spring and when they all left for the season. In the very wet springs and later when he wasn't strong enough to walk, he or Dorothy, his wife, drove the road, checking on the birds.

Our neighborhood has very fond memories of Bob's devotion to bluebirds. One of the neighbors recalls at a neighborhood breakfast, his watching out the window for the first spring sightings of male bluebirds. Bob's contribution to sustaining bluebirds in our area is unforgettable. Without his efforts, bluebirds might never have returned here or if they had, most of us wouldn't have been encouraged to notice. We do our best now to keep them returning and preserve what Bob started here.



## LOCKUP ON BLUEBIRD ROUTE

*Submitted by Nancy Fraser, Bander*

One Sunday I received a call from monitor Patty Sorensen: "I've got a problem here." Expecting a bluebird question, I was all ears. She and her husband Rick had driven through an open gate to monitor boxes on an extensive vineyard property. When they returned to the gate, it had been closed and locked with a chain and padlock. There was no one on the property, and the monitors, the car and monitoring equipment were inside wanting to be outside. Patty had already called a family member to come pick them up. I looked to see if my contact number for the manager was in my cell telephone. No luck. It was in my records at home. I was on a wildlife refuge an hour away. Next telephone call, the monitor was outside the gate with her belongings and equipment. The car was still inside, with a note asking that the finder call her on Monday



*Photo courtesy of Patty Sorensen*

to arrange for her to pick up the car. At the last call I received, her kindly pickup person had come and driven her around her route so that she could finish. On Monday, she received a call that her car was "found" and pick up was arranged. Learned: Monitoring on a non-working day on a locked agricultural, business property is not the best of scheduling, unless plans have been made together with the owner/manager. Contact telephone numbers are crucial, and need to be with those who most likely will need to get in touch. In this case there was another open exit, but no one in our project had ever had occasion to need to know about it.

All's well that ends well. We learn by making mistakes and we avoid mistakes by learning. And how about that friend who became the chauffeur for bluebird route monitoring that day?

## 2012 ANNUAL MEETING

On September 15, the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Annual Meeting was held at Champoege State Heritage Area. Volunteers heard from our President, Dave Flaming, who thanked all of our volunteers for their field work and information collection/documentation, and recognized our board members for their work over the past year. Dave presented the financial picture - strong thanks to our many contributors. John Deshler gave a wonderful informational talk about Northern Pygmy Owls that breed and live in Forest Park. His videos of the birds were especially entertaining and enlightening about the behavior and habitat of this native, diurnal owl species. All were invited to a thank you pot luck provided by the Board of Directors, and an opportunity to meet and talk together with other volunteers to share experiences on their bluebird trails, the natural world, and other timely topics. Our project's success depends on our volunteers and your careful

monitoring and banding activities. Our landowners graciously allow us to place and monitor nestboxes on their property. Thank you for all that you do and the time you devote to our efforts.

## COMMUNITY EFFORT: GETTING A VISITOR HOME

*by Zenobia Lapeyre*

PBRP volunteers as ambassadors? Sure, why not? On any given day you can find more than one volunteer doing something on bluebird routes, visible and accessible to the public. We expect to chat with property owners and neighbors as we go about our job of monitoring or banding. Very often a car stops near our location and the driver asks for directions (a challenge for those of us who are not residing in the area of our bluebird route location). But once in awhile something out of the ordinary happens.

I experienced one such encounter this summer just as I had finished banding a clutch of bluebird chicks on Parrett Mountain.

I had just begun to make my way home when I saw a car stopped in the road ahead of me. A woman was standing in the road, talking to the driver. She approached me and my car with the same questions she had asked the previous driver (and probably other drivers before that): She had a hand-drawn map that she was following to walk what was supposed to be a five-mile loop, from her B&B and back again. Somehow she had gone astray and she was trying to figure out how to get home.

I had never heard of the road she was looking for but suggested we could look at the map in my car. I pulled into a nearby driveway with map. The homeowner came out of the house and asked if we needed help. Dorrie, as I found out her name later, produced the hand drawn map, went through her story once again, and we all discussed where we were standing right now, where she probably needed to be and how very far she was from that spot. Of course I would give her a ride, but the problem was that I didn't know where to take her.

Dorrie suggested that we could just retrace the route she had already walked. She knew where she had been, she just didn't know where she was going!

We drove five or six miles through forest and vineyards and farms, with Dorrie guiding me at every turn, until we reached her B&B (on the other side of the mountain from where all her advisers were guiding her).

As we drove past nest boxes we talked about the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project and our work with the bluebirds. She said she had noticed bluebirds flying in front of her as she walked past the boxes and we agreed that they are very special birds. In fact, it was really the birds that had brought us together and which had effectively engineered her 'rescue'.

## The Western Bluebird: Mapping Recovery with GIS

*By Michelle Adlong*

What is GIS? It's not "Google Image Search," as one of my friends guessed. In the realm of scientists, engineers, and governing agencies, GIS stands for Geographic Information System. It is a powerful and exciting computer-based mapping tool that supplements traditional spreadsheet-based data with a spatial component. Its practical applications are widespread. For example, it has been used by urban planners to identify potential sites for neighborhood parks, civil engineers to track buried water mains, and scientists to research diseases caused by pesticide-contaminated drinking wells. If you see a map today, chances are it was made with GIS.

As a University of California, Berkeley master's student, I believed that the PBRP's wealth of historic data would be well-suited for a GIS makeover. Therefore, for a recent class project, a partner and I demonstrated a couple applications of GIS to display and analyze PBRP monitoring data. To do so, we answered the following general questions:

### 1. Where are the nests?

PBRP volunteers have monitored a total of 1550 nests since the project detailed database records began in 1997, though not every nest was monitored every year. We thought it would be useful for the PBRP to have a map showing the locations of all the nests. To generate this map, we used ArcGIS's Geocoding tool. We started with the bare bones information: an Excel spreadsheet with the nest location addresses and in some cases, just the Thomas Brothers map quadrant. The result was the five-county map in Figure 1. More detailed maps could easily be generated, but we show the zoomed-out version in order to protect the location privacy.

### 2. Which nests are historically successful?

To identify which nests have been historically successful, we used the GIS tools of Interpolation and Map Algebra. We manipulated bird banding records in GIS to identify the following three factors: average number of new bands per year, average number of clutches per year, and percent of years that resulted in at least one new band. Each nest was then assigned a "territory" in GIS based on Thiessen polygons. A composite map, shown in Figure 2, was

developed to reflect overall nest success based on the three factors and normalized for the number of years monitored.

Though not many trends are visible, birds near the Willamette River appear particularly successful. Otherwise, survival from egg to fledgling is highly variable and is affected by temporal variables such as temperature and rainfall. Statistics for average clutch size and number of bands per clutch are shown in Figure 3.

### 3. Where should additional nest boxes go?

Our hypothetical question led to a GIS-based suitability analysis procedure that the PBRP could use if it wanted to expand monitoring in the future. We considered the following constraints and opportunities for nest box placement: bluebirds prefer open fields and meadows, bluebirds avoid forested areas, bluebirds avoid areas with heavy human development, volunteers like a short walking distance from roads, birds need to maintain a minimum distance from existing nest boxes, and nests cannot be placed in wetlands or waterways. Another constraint was pesticide use, but Oregon no longer tracks this data due to state government budget cuts.

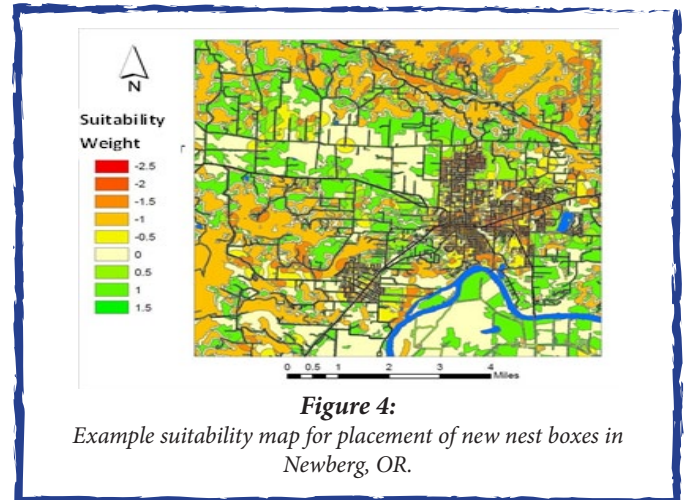
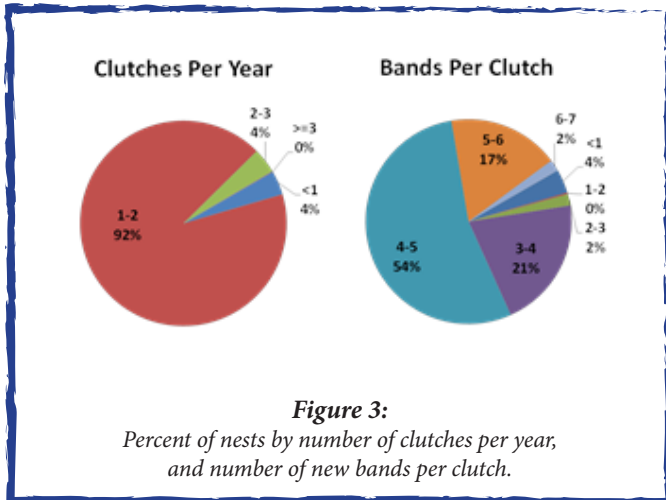
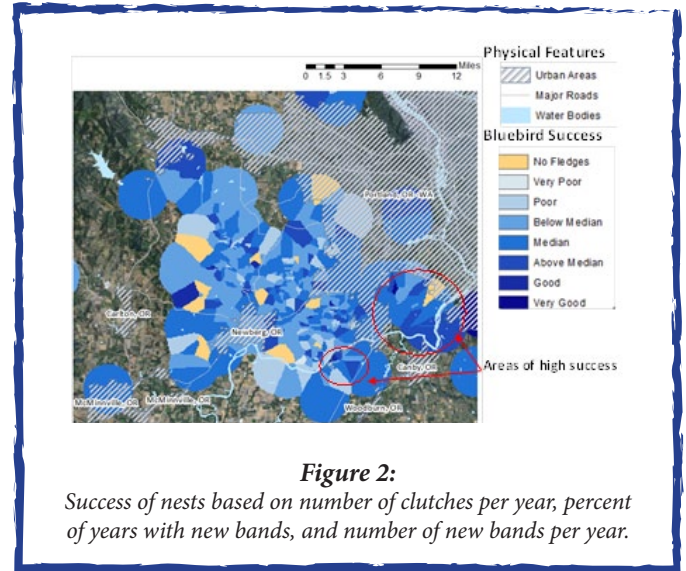
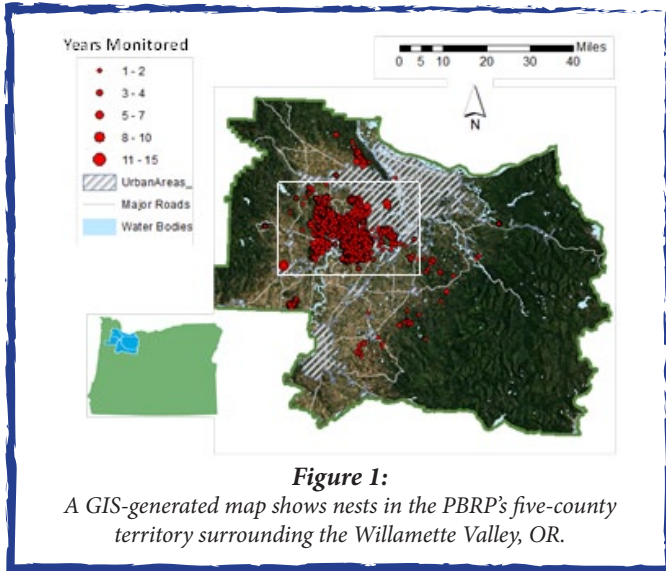
Based on these opportunities and constraints, data from the Oregon Spatial Data Library was combined with PBRP-supplied nest box locations to develop an example suitability map for the vicinity of Newberg, OR, shown in Figure 4. The shading is a continuum from red (poor suitability) to green (excellent suitability).

Hopefully our efforts demonstrated the great potential value of GIS in monitoring projects such as the PBRP. Though the maps shown here may not be directly applicable to PBRP efforts, maps made by similar methods could be customized to display spatial data that the PBRP volunteers already collect. GIS mapping is a powerful tool that can aid in public outreach and data analysis.



*Photo courtesy of Zenobia Lapeyre*





## CHAMPOEG BLUEBIRD DAY - JUNE 2012

Fifteen volunteers manned 4 stations at Champoeg State Heritage Area Visitors' Center on June 16 to assist staff and Friends of CSHA volunteers at the annual Bluebird Day event. An informational table and display for our project and for the Pioneer Garden greeted visitors at the entrance. Some of our newest volunteers ably staffed this area and gave visitors inside looks at what it is like to be a bluebird monitor. Visitors had a lot of questions and a lot of personal bluebird stories to tell. Conversation was lively. CSHA volunteers and PBRP volunteers collaborated to keep the Inside the Nestbox video running in the auditorium. CSHA monitors Nelda and Ron Skidmore were on hand at the Bluebird Discovery Station behind the Visitors' Center to show guests one of the nestboxes actively used at the Park. And for those with the interest and bravery to construct their own nestbox, there were happy volunteers giving instruction and encouragement in the barn while kids and adults built Chickadee nestboxes to take home. This was a popular activity, and the kit materials were used up well before the event closed at 3 pm. Lots of happy and busy Chickadees will enjoy these nestboxes next season!



Photo courtesy of Zenobia Lapeyre

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*Photo courtesy of Zenobia Lapeyre*

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