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PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

Post Office Box 1469 | Sherwood, Oregon 97140 | www.prescottbluebird.com

Newsletter ~ Spring 2013

From The President's Nestbox

Mistletoe, the parasite of Oregon White Oaks provides an abundant winter food source for numerous Willamette Valley birds. In addition to being host to a major food supply, the valley White Oaks provide winter habitat such as abandoned woodpecker nest sites. Unfortunately, this native tree is endangered. Scientists estimate that within the Willamette valley, we have lost 99% of the White Oak savannas since the arrival of European settlers.

Two important oak savanna habitats remaining in the northern Willamette Valley are those at Champoege State Heritage Area outside of Newberg and the Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge in Sherwood. As can be expected, both are winter and summer home to numerous pairs of Western Bluebirds.

Homeowners needn't plant white oaks to provide winter food for birds. There are winter berry plants that are available for backyards, such as blueberry, blackberry, Oregon grape, and sumac.



As the 2013 Bluebird season starts, I want to give a warm welcome to our new monitors (their names are listed elsewhere in this issue). Have fun!

Also, Colleen Hill is joining our banding staff this year while Dana Robinson becomes a Bander Assistant.

To everyone, have a great Bluebird season!
Dave Flaming

It is thought that the winter distribution of the Western Bluebird in Western Oregon is highly dependent upon the availability of mistletoe berries.

- David Fix,
'Birds Of Oregon' (Marshall,
Hunter, & Contreras)

Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

WESTERN BLUEBIRD NESTING SUMMARY

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Nesting Attempts	552	502	414	401
Failed Attempts	159	150	145	99
% Successful	71%	70%	65%	65%
Earliest Hatch Date	5/1	4/28	5/5	4/20
Latest Hatch Date	8/21	8/28	8/18	8/23
Total Eggs Laid	2,827	2,430	2,043	2,055
Avg Eggs/Clutch	5.1	4.8	4.9	5.1
Total Hatchlings	2,125	1,743	1,507	1,576
% Eggs Hatched	75%	72%	74%	77%
Avg Hatchlings/Clutch	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.9
Total Nestlings Banded	1,917	1,484	1,200	1,337
% Nestlings Banded	90%	85%	80%	85%
Total Nestlings Fledged	1,729	1,394	1,086	1,258
% Nestlings Fledged	81%	80%	72%	80%

Check our web site for additional statistics: PrescottBluebird.com

Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre

Spring Workshop

The Spring Workshop was held on February 23, at Champoege Heritage Park Visitors' Center. Fifty two people were present, 60% or so interested new potential volunteers. Despite the very best cooperative efforts of the Park Volunteers, only about 45 chairs could be produced. Several people graciously stood for the presentations and Question/Answer sessions. Dave Flaming and Bob Burbank spoke, and returning volunteers provided some experience-based information and anecdotes. Scott Morrison worked on nestbox demonstration preparation. Charlie Stalzer ably handled the hardware and software needed to show visuals for the speakers. The refreshment table was awesome; thanks to Lyn Burniston. Charlotte Elder helped things keep running smoothly, and Pat Johnston manned the registration table (once Nancy got it set up!). Thank you to all who attended.

After all the fun was over, eighteen interested folks signed up to be new bluebird route monitors. They will work with banders in the upcoming season learning the details and the joys of bluebird field work. We had a few more volunteers than route openings, and will offer them an opportunity to be called back should someone have to discontinue volunteering during the season.



Prospective New Volunteer Checks Out Route Map

New Volunteers

*Thank you and welcome to
Prescott Bluebird
Recovery Project!*

Betty & John Ballentine

James Butch

Larry Church

John Deen

Claudia Fredricks

Katrina Howell

Michelle Koeppe

Kathi & Bill Litherland

Stan & Krista McKay

Joy Redington

Marilyn Stinnett

Michal & Dave Wert

Surveying for Vineyards with PBRP Nestboxes

In our data base some nestbox locations are listed as vineyard property. We hope soon to include an article about vineyards and bluebird nesting. If you host our monitored nestboxes and are a vineyard/winery, please let us know. We want our data base to be accurate, and want to ensure we include all such locations when we begin to write this article. Please send your name & physical address to our mailbox at email@prescottbluebird.com. You can instead send a link to your website address.

Event Within an Event

Last season, 5 bluebirds successfully fledged in mid-June at Sokol Blosser Vineyard on the same weekend as a major outdoor event that brought visitors into the same venue as the estimated fledging date of the brood.



Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre

In the words of monitor Russ Rosner:

"Five young were in the nestbox, reaching all the way out of the opening to take food offered for the past 24-36 hours or so. Against all odds, the chicks managed to fledge either late in the evening after Saturday night's event or very early Sunday morning.

It was impressive to watch the parents coming to the box and feeding the young during the event while a few hundred people milled around and almost constantly passed right by the box. The parents carefully timed their swoop to the nest hole when there was a small window of availability (a few seconds of no one walking by). They darted in, made a quick exchange of food to the beak that darted out to receive it, and then dashed off."

I thought that the history on the adult bluebirds might be of interest:

- The female was captured in June 2012, when the 5 nestlings from the above clutch were banded. She was unbanded, and banded at that time.
- The male was hatched at this same nestbox location in June, 2007, one of 4 nestlings. He was recaptured in May, 2009 at this same nestbox location, and 6 young fledged from this clutch. He was recaptured in June, 2010, at another nestbox location at the winery, and 3 young fledged.

Save the Dates . . .

Bluebird Day

at Champoege State Heritage Area
Saturday, June 15, from 1:00 pm until 4:00 pm

PBRP Annual Meeting/Fall Wrap-up

Saturday morning, September 14
At Champoege State Heritage Area
Visitors' Center

Seen and Heard

On the Oregon Birders On Line listserv (obol): It was interesting to read the recent thread about bluebirds in the Willamette Valley. Since my arrival in '05, I have enjoyed the work of bluebird conservation groups. Today the Oak Savannah area at TRNWR (Sherwood) was teeming with bluebirds. They are also doing well in the fields west of Wilsonville. The people involved with Prescott Bluebird Recovery are successfully and quietly supporting these birds, and I have been taking Bluebirds and the volunteers working to save them for granted. Mea culpa. Clay (Sherwood)

A landowner said: "I am looking for a new home for the nestbox on my property. Feral cats continue to increase around my barn, and I am fearful for the safety of the fledglings."

"Let the blue season begin!"

Chickadee Nest in Gigantic Cavity

It seems, at least on some of our routes, that there was an increased incidence of chickadee nesting. This amusing anecdote was submitted by, Betsey Rixford, Monitor on Edy Road, Sherwood:

Yesterday I was out on a long hike with son Craig on Mt. Tam north of San Francisco. He exited the wood-enclosed restroom 2 miles from the parking lot saying, "Mom, you have to see this. It's 'bathroom birding.'" Despite my weary legs, I hurried over. Much to my surprise, there was a bird nest on the metal toilet paper holder! It was a moss nest about 4x4 with very fine material, primarily moss in the center, looking ready for eggs. Craig stood up on the metal toilet and found there was a very small opening in the mesh screening at the roof line. Since it was all wood, it must have looked like a very large tree with a cavity to some bird, maybe Chickadee? Wish I'd had a camera!





2012 Contributors

*Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project owes its success to its donors.
Every dollar you give helps us to help our beloved Western Bluebirds.*

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Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre

Why So Blue?

BY Helen Fields

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For decades, scientists have known how birds with yellow or red feathers usually get their color: It comes from pigments in foods the birds eat. Flamingoes, for instance, extract pink pigments from algae and crustaceans they filter out of the water. The challenge has been to figure out exactly how bluebirds get their color. It can't be their diet: blue pigments, like those in blueberries, are destroyed when birds digest them. Scientists theorized that birds look blue for the same reason the sky looks blue: Red and yellow wavelengths pass through the atmosphere, but shorter blue wavelengths bounce off of particles and scatter, emitting a blue glow in every direction.

Richard Prum, an ornithologist at Yale, discovered that birds make blue feathers in a different way. To find the origins of avian blue (which appears in many slightly different shades) Prum and colleagues have analyzed hundreds of feathers at the Argonne National Laboratory, where particle accelerators generate extremely strong X-rays.

Prum discovered that as a blue feather grows, something amazing happens. Inside each cell, stringy keratin molecules separate from water, like oil from vinegar. When the cell dies, the water dries away and is replaced by air, leaving a structure of keratin protein interspersed with air pockets, like a sponge. When white light strikes a blue feather, the keratin pattern causes red and yellow wavelengths to cancel each other out, while blue wavelengths of light reinforce and amplify one another and reflect back to the beholder's eye. The result: blue, an example of what scientists call a structural color (as opposed to a pigmented color) because it's generated by light interacting with a feather's 3_D arrangement. And different shapes and sizes of these air pockets and keratin make the different shades of blue.

Building such precise nanostructures is an exceptional evolutionary feat of engineering, yet the color blue has popped up independently on many different branches of the bird family, especially in males. This raises a different question: Why? One theory is that a set of fine blue feathers signifies a healthy, well-fed male, advertising his good genes to potential mates. Prum wonders whether this practical theory has gone too far with the idea that male ornaments such as antlers or wattles are signals to females. "I think that can be true, but perhaps mostly not true. Perhaps they are 'merely beautiful'.

What if birds, like humans, have a sense of beauty? Rather than being cold, calculating egg-laying machines, what if female birds just like the pretty boys? Prum has been teaching a class called "Evolution of Beauty" and is working on a theory that combines evolution and aesthetics; he thinks physical beauty in animals evolves along with attraction to it. Prum collaborates with philosophers, mathematicians, and physicists; his willingness to think across disciplines was part of what won him a MacArthur Fellowship, or "genius grant" a few years ago. He's using the highest tech tools to study an age-old question. "It's simultaneously about physics, et cetera, but it's really about, what do females want? It's really about beauty."

Recommendation from a PBRP Volunteer:

For a fascinating look at feathers, their development and practical uses by birds (and humans!), check out the book **Feathers** by Thor Hanson. In this book, Hanson details a sweeping natural history, as feathers have been used to fly, protect, attract, and adorn through time and place. Applying the research of paleontologists, ornithologists, biologists, engineers, and even art historians, Hanson asks and answers the questions: What are feathers? How did they evolve? How are they formed? What do they mean to us? Engineers call feathers the most efficient insulating material ever discovered, and are at the root of biology's most enduring debate. They silence the flight of owls and keep penguins dry below the ice and insulated as they incubate eggs on the exposed icy plains of Antarctica. They have decorated queens, jesters, shamans, and priests. And they have been used to ink documents and art over centuries.

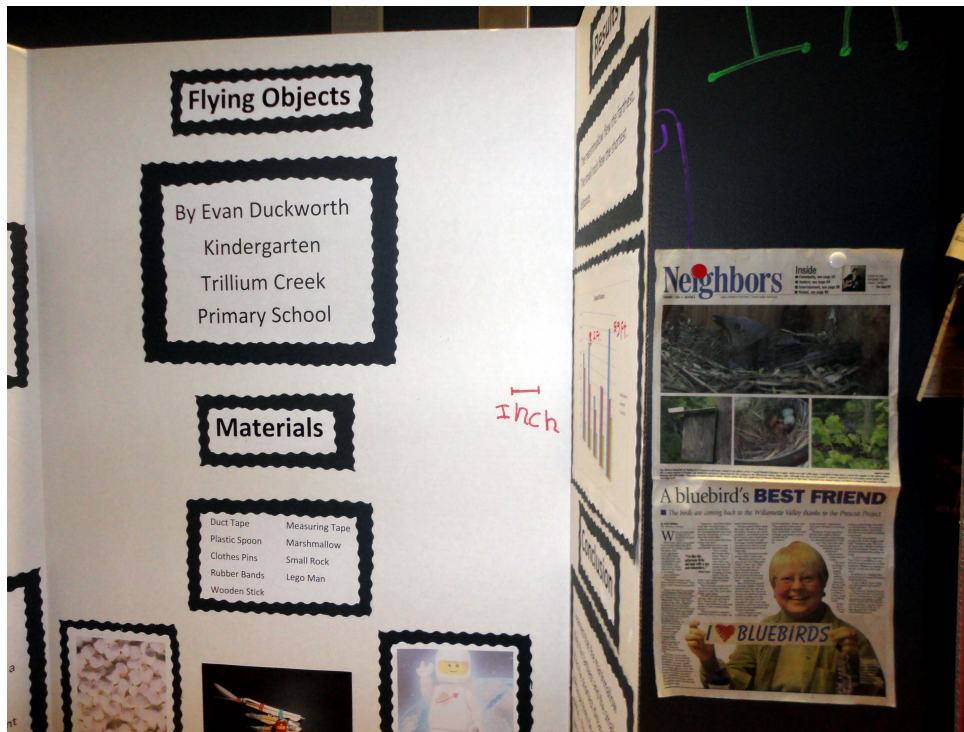


Photo Credit ~ Karrie Duckworth, Monitor

A Spring Bluebird Coincidence...

By Nancy Fraser, Bander

A nice article about Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project, our need for volunteers, and bluebird nesting habits appeared in West Linn and Lake Oswego newspapers in February. Lyn Burniston and I met with Cliff Newell who then wrote the story and included some large photos. We believe that this along with another article printed in the Sherwood newspaper, and written by former long-time PBRP volunteer Carolyn Uyemura, were instrumental in reaching many guests who attended the February 23 Spring Workshop as well as the communities.

A few days ago, I heard from a volunteer monitor that her son was presenting his science project in the library at his primary school. Karrie said she looked with pride at his primary school project and then suddenly realized that my familiar face was beaming at her from the bulletin board just to the right of Evan's display. There was the article prominently posted, as well as being highlighted at the all-school morning meeting. It never hurts to bring the bluebird conservation message at an early age!

Join us at
Champoeg State Heritage Area
for

Bluebird Day!

**Saturday, June 15
from 1:00 pm until 4:00 pm**

EVENTS INCLUDE:

Observe bluebirds at their nest boxes

•

Purchase and build a nest box

•

Bluebird-related Junior Ranger
program for the kids

•

Bluebird exhibits, video presentations
and sales items

Searching for Mealworm Sources?

PBRP has had a positive experience ordering Snookums Best mealworms from Bassett Cricket Ranch, Visalia, California (www.bccricket.com)

You can also use the Internet to seek other sources of mealworms. Resources for ordering mealworms can be found at this site: <http://www.sialis.org/bluebirdstore.htm#mealworms>

Guests On My Banding Route

By Nancy Fraser, Bander

During the winter of 2011, I was approached by the planning committee for the online auction benefitting the Audubon Portland Wildlife Care Center Rehabilitation Hospital: "Call of the Wild". In brainstorming, one of the volunteers suggested supporters of the mission of the care center might be motivated to bid for an opportunity to go out with someone monitoring and banding bluebirds . . . and thought of Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project.

Next thing I knew, my offering was right up there with a host of other bidding options for wild/wildlife adventures: Wildflower Walk; Zen Birding Trip; a weekend at a beach house; an opportunity to tour the California Condor breeding facility program; a chance to rappel off a local bridge where Peregrine Falcons nest; a private gliding adventurer with a licensed pilot; a day at the WCC alongside the Avian Veterinarian; and many more.

When the bidding was over and I was given the contact information for the winners. Being a novice at this, I quickly discovered that the devil was in the details . . . scheduling. The choice of date(s) had to accommodate my schedule, the availability of each of the four members of the winning bidder's family; and most importantly, the

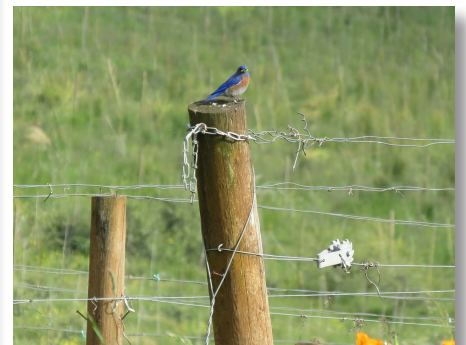
bluebirds' nesting timing. It wouldn't hurt if the weather would be fine, or at least marginally pleasant. With the co-operation of the birds and landowners, we were able to schedule two trips in order to see bluebird nesting in various stages, as would a monitor through the season.

The first trip was to a vineyard where multiple broods were in different stages of the egg-laying, hatching, and maturation process. We spent a few moments staging at our car pool location, and a slightly longer time with a few reference books and a chance to talk about the Western Bluebird breeding cycle, habitat preferences, diet, and our conservation efforts on behalf of the birds. The nestbox monitor and landowner joined us for a few moments to wish us well. The interested guests had an opportunity to see a clutch in progress where there were 3 bluebird eggs and another clutch with nestlings nearly mature enough to band. We visited and banded three 13 day old nestlings at another nestbox. The experienced adults were willing to be recaptured, so that we could review their histories in our data base by recording their identification band numbers. The male bird has been nesting at this nestbox since 2009, and the female since 2010. Later in the season, after these 3 young fledged, an additional 5 young fledged from a second clutch in early August.

This experience was rewarding for me, and I hope also for the auction participants. If asked again this nesting season,

I will welcome the opportunity to expose interested learners to the experience of fieldwork, bluebird conservation, and the collaborative efforts of our volunteers and landowners in making a difference for the Western Bluebirds in our area.

Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre



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2013 Important Upcoming Dates!

May 18, 2013	Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge Bird Festival
June 15	Champoeg Bluebird Day (from 1 pm till 4 pm)
September 14	Fall Wrap Up at Champoeg State Heritage Area
October 3-5	North American Bluebird Society Convention Aiken, South Carolina http://www.southcarolinabluebirds.org/NABS2013.htm for information

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