



# Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter

## Fall 2009

*An affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society*

### What's Inside...

**2**

**New Board Members**

**3**

**Fall Wrap Up Recap**

**4**

**Removing and Relocating Nestboxes**

**6**

**NABS Annual Meeting Recap**

**7**

**Upcoming Dates & Spring New Monitors' Workshop**

**8**

**Using Photos with Monitoring Forms**

**11**

**Annual Donation Request**

### President's Perspectives

*By Nancy Fraser*

Fall rain and winter chills have both forced me inside instead of tending to end of season chores in my garden. I am mulling over the completed bluebird season.

Although this was a difficult year for the bluebirds, having to accommodate a more changeable than usual early spring, and a sustained stretch of very hot weather in mid-summer, the preliminary data submitted by our volunteer monitors and banders suggests a reasonable number of fledged birds. The losses due to weather and predation prevented what might have been a VERY successful year for the birds.

Our project is experiencing growing pains at the same time that every one of us is being impacted by economic forces that make it prudent to scrutinize and prioritize spending. We plan to evaluate our expenses and volunteer resources in order to reduce expenses, while continuing to be stewards for the Western Bluebird in the northern Willamette Valley.

We will begin electronic distribution of our newsletter to those of our readers who express willingness to read the newsletter electronically

rather than as a mailed, printed copy. This will conserve our resources as well as represent reduced consumption of paper products. I hope that you will be able to consider this option and join us in this initiative.

At the August 29 Annual Meeting, we elected our board members for the next two years. At a board meeting after the annual meeting, Lauri Kunzman was elected Treasurer, Jack Carter Secretary, and Nancy Fraser, President. The next board election will be in the fall of 2011.

We welcomed new monitors to our ranks this season and they have blossomed in their first season. Zenobia Lapeyre became one of our corps of banders.

Work at Champoege State Heritage Park continues, as the number of useful, productive nestboxes is brought into a manageable and successful range. Thank you to Nelda and Ron Skidmore, Scott Morrison, Lauri Kunzman, and the management and volunteers at the Park for their enthusiasm, zeal, and team approach to this very large project.

*continued on page 2*

## Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President  
**Nancy Fraser**

Treasurer  
**Lauri Kunzman**

Secretary  
**Jack Carter**

### Directors

**Lyn Burniston**  
**Bob Burbank**  
**Charlotte Elder**  
**Zenobia Lapeyre**  
**Nelda Skidmore**  
**Dave Flaming**, Past President  
**Pat Johnston**, Founding Member  
**Brenda McGowan**, Founding Member

Master Bander  
**Donald Powers, PhD**

### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Education Coordinator **Lori Loen**

Finance Coordinators **Jim & Barby Conroy**

Newsletter Editor **Abby Jaworski**

Webmaster, Email Voice of PBRP **Charlie Stalzer**

Nest box Coordinator **Jeff Wiese**

Database Coordinator **Dave Flaming**

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

**Assistants to Banders in 2010:**  
Scott Morrison, Dave Sewell

## President's Perspectives

*Continued from page 1*

A number of volunteers are leaving the project after this season. We hope that some of them will be able, as they plan, to return. I will acknowledge our retiring volunteers specifically in the spring newsletter, and I would like to take the opportunity now at the completion of the season to thank all volunteers for their dedicated and careful work on behalf of the bluebirds.

As we plan for next season, we have work to do within our project overall. We have too many nestboxes. For years we have operated on the "more nestboxes will produce more bluebirds" principle, and evidence is mounting both in our own region and elsewhere across the country that this is not true. In fact we may have reached a combination of nestbox numbers and nestbox locations that is actually counterproductive to native secondary cavity nesting birds and to Western Bluebirds in particular. "Fewer are Better" is the name of our new approach. We will begin immediately to evaluate existing nestboxes with the aim to reduce and/or reposition nestboxes to better meet our goal to support Western Bluebird nesting successes. All of you who volunteer or who host bluebirds on your property can be proud to be a part of this effort.

## New Board Members

At our annual meeting in August, two new members were elected to the board. Charlotte Elder has been a monitor for many years. She lives in the Charbonneau area, and monitors nest boxes between Wilsonville and Sherwood. Nelda Skidmore joined PBRP as a volunteer two years ago. She and her husband are monitors at Champoege State Heritage Park, where they often spent time bicycling and walking before they attended one of our spring workshops and signed on as volunteers. I am pleased and excited to have Charlotte and Nelda's ideas and enthusiasm added to our board.

## Annual Meeting and Fall Wrap Up

-by Lauri Kunzman

PBRP's Annual Meeting and Fall Wrap Up was held Saturday, August 29, 2009 at the Champoege Heritage State Park. As monitors and banders registered, each was given a beautiful thank you gift consisting of two small note pads with bluebird photos on the covers and a message reading, "Thank you to our wonderful volunteers." Included also was a ballpoint pen with the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project name followed by the slogan, ***Bluebirds wild and free***. PBRP President, Nancy Fraser, assembled the entire gift packet.

The business meeting was opened by President Nancy Fraser. The Nominating Committee Report was presented, no additional nominations were made from the floor, and the slate for the Board of Directors as submitted was elected unanimously. We welcome two new members to our board, Charlotte Elder and Nelda Skidmore.

We were entertained and educated with the delightful, informative slide show and narrative by our Master Bander, Dr. Donald Powers, Professor of Biology, George Fox University, Newberg, OR. His presentation was entitled 'God's Amazing Little Creatures-Hummingbirds'. What a charming topic.

Following Dr. Powers' talk, there was a lively panel discussion with panel members Dave Flaming, Lauri Kunzman, and Scott Morrison. The timely topic was 'Maximizing Bluebird Nesting Opportunities & Success on Our Bluebird Routes'. Dave, our database manager, presented statistics validating our Project's needs to address the abundant number of boxes we have on public and private land vs. bluebird occupied nesting boxes. Salient points and guidelines for each of us in taking responsibility to improve bluebird nesting opportunities were included. Please read the corresponding article in this newsletter titled 'Fewer Is Better' for a fuller explanation of this timely subject.

The group adjourned to the enclosed patio of the CHSP's Pioneer Pavilion for a Potluck Picnic. Attendees enjoyed socializing while the board

provided good grits, including Nelda Skidmore's Calico Beans (see recipe following). Charlie Stalzer brought his imprinting tools to emblazon PBRP's logo onto t-shirts and other items.

A big thank you goes out to all the volunteer monitors and banders and to our hosts at Champoege Heritage State park.



### Calico Baked Beans

*Nelda Skidmore made this recipe and brought it to the Annual Meeting. The dish was a huge hit, and Nelda was kind enough to share her recipe, handed down from her mother. Enjoy!*

- 1 large can baked beans
- 1 can butter beans
- 1 can red kidney beans
- 1 can lima beans
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 1 cup catsup
- 1 cup brown sugar (I use more like a 1/2 cup)
- 1/2 lb bacon cut into pieces and fried - doesn't have to be crisp
- 1 tsp dry mustard

If you are baking it, don't drain the beans. If you are making this in a crock-pot, drain off 1/2 the juice. Mix together and bake at 350 (I put it into a crock pot on high) for 2 hours. This is a very flexible recipe. I sometimes add a can of black beans but other types of beans can also be added.

## Fewer is Better... Removing and Relocating Nestboxes to Improve Bluebird Nesting Success

*-by Lauri Kunzman and Nancy Fraser*



Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project's goal is to support and enhance the success of the Western Bluebird in the northern Willamette Valley. Since Hubert Prescott recognized the decline of this species in our area, and devoted years to locating the birds and providing additional nesting opportunities by erecting nest boxes, we have expanded the number of boxes. When new ideas have been shared by other bluebird support organizations, our project has evaluated them and embraced them if they appear promising and possible for us.

Landowners have added additional nest boxes on their property with the same goals. PBRP has used nesting data to evaluate the results of these new ideas and how they succeed with Western Bluebirds. Sharing this knowledge with our volunteers, landowners within our project, and the public has always

been a priority. Change, when evidence suggests that change will be expected to have a positive effect, has always been our operational mode. Change in removing nestboxes is somehow harder to grasp. Here is what our project will be doing in the coming three or more seasons.

PBRP's nesting data has shown that, overall in the project, utilization of nestboxes by bluebirds has dropped from just over 40% to less than 25%. The most recent years of raw data suggest a substantial increase in the number of other species nesting. On individual routes, the utilization ratio varies from a high of 100% bluebird utilization to less than 20%. Our Board believes that rather than representing only bluebirds returning to natural nesting sites, these observations suggest a substantial reduction in their nesting opportunities due to competition with other species.

The past several seasons, we have recognized that "paired" nestboxes (two placed back to back in the same location) and "close proximity pairs" (those placed 10-15 feet apart in the same location) have not substantially increased bluebird nesting attempts. Single nest boxes seem to be the most successful. However, adding more and more single nestboxes in close proximity does not result in more bluebird nest events. In fact, unless these single nest boxes are at least 100 yards apart, no more than one bluebird pair will take advantage of the box for nesting.

**It's all about food** – Western Bluebirds have a feeding/foraging territorial need for at least this much distance from other bluebirds. When large numbers of boxes are placed closer together, other species will



use the boxes instead. This results in greater and greater numbers of competing species, and fewer and fewer bluebirds.

This 2010 nesting season, we are requesting that all of our monitors and banders, as well as landowners, evaluate bluebird vs. other species nesting in each nest box on their route or property. Nest boxes that have not hosted bluebirds for the past three years will get the first attention. We will make a gradual reduction in nest boxes that have not been productive, and will consider relocating boxes to more suitable habitat if the local environment has changed.

Gradual changes implemented incrementally over the next three years will reduce the stress that could result on all cavity-nesting native species if we made all the changes in one season.



The changes will result in a more favorable configuration for successful bluebird nesting. It will also reduce the amount of busywork for monitors and allow them to focus on observing bluebirds and gathering data to assist us in evaluating how we can best support these wonderful birds. Together we can continue to make a positive difference for Western Bluebird success in maintaining their numbers in our region.

Thank you for your continued support!



### **To all of our volunteers...**

PBRP would like to take a moment to thank all of our volunteers. From bluebird monitors, to landowners, to Board Members, to photographers, to those who submit articles for our newsletter... the list goes on and on. PBRP wouldn't be here without you, and we owe our success to you.

**THANK YOU!!!**

## Annual Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society

-By Nancy Fraser



I attended the 2009 NABS (North American Bluebird Society) annual meeting in Grantville, Pennsylvania, in early September. At this meeting, I represented PBRP as one of the nearly fifty affiliate members of this national organization. Three new affiliates were announced at the meeting. The North American Bluebird Society is a non-profit education, conservation and research organization that promotes the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species in North America.

The meeting was well attended, especially by members from Pennsylvania and other contiguous states. All of us enjoyed the opportunity to speak with other bluebirders in an informal setting, and learning from speakers who presented topics directly applicable to bluebirds as well as other species of interest such as Saw Whet Owls (the smallest owl

present in the NE United States) and the American Kestrel (the smallest North American falcon). The 2010 NABS meeting will be in September, in the Ontario, Canada area. And here is something exciting for us . . . the 2011 NABS meeting will be in Bozeman, Montana. If you have an opportunity to plan to attend either meeting, you will not be disappointed. In fact, you will be energized, as I was, by spending a few days with like-minded people who have literally thousands of tips and anecdotes to share.

I strongly encourage you to become a NABS member. Regular annual membership dues are \$30 for a household or \$20 for an individual. Membership includes a beautiful quarterly NABS newsletter. To become a member, go to the NABS Website: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>. Because of PBRP's affiliate membership in NABS, our volunteers can take advantage of a special offer, the A Plus membership, for \$15 annually. You can join at this discounted membership cost at the NABS website <http://nabluebirdsociety.org/aplus/>. If you would prefer to give your credit card info in person, rather than online, contact NABS board member Dan Sparks. He is available noon-3:00 pm, Mon-Fri (Eastern Time) at 812-988-1876.

### A note from the editor...

As announced in our Spring 2009 issue, PBRP has made our newsletters available both online at [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com) as well as via email. If you would like to sign up to receive the newsletter by email, either for this issue or for all future issues, please email the editor at: [pbrpeditor@yahoo.com](mailto:pbrpeditor@yahoo.com). Signing up for one of a variety of free email accounts that are available to you on the Internet, and then signing up to receive our newsletter via email, is a great way of helping us make every dollar count. It is PBRP's policy to not share your email address or other personal information with anyone.

Thank you for your continued support!

-Abby Jaworski, Newsletter Editor



## Spring New Monitors' Workshop

New volunteer bluebird route monitors will be needed in 2010. The annual spring new monitors' workshop will be from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon on Saturday, February 20, 2010, at Champoeg State Heritage Park's Visitors' Center. The session for returning monitors and banders will be from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. There are a number of monitor positions to be filled next year.

Although PBRP will promote the need for new monitors and the information that interested individuals can glean from the workshop in the media, direct personal communication from current volunteers, landowners, and our newsletter readers is an important way for us to find people who would like to learn more about bluebirds and help us to support their nesting success. I ask that you assist us in getting this word out.

If you are interested yourself, please come to the workshop. If you have questions about volunteering, please visit our website at: [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com).

From our volunteers, we will be looking for help in the organization and presentation of the workshop. Please respond if you hear from board members or the event coordinator.



*PBRP would like to extend a special thank you to Zenobia Lapeyre for sharing her wonderful photographs of Western Bluebirds taken during the 2009 nesting season. All photographs in this issue were taken by Zenobia. Zenobia has contributed many photos in past issues as well, and we have enjoyed her contributions immensely.*

### Important Upcoming Dates...

**Spring New Monitor Workshop**  
February 20, 2010

**Western Bluebird Nesting Season**  
March through August, 2010

**Bluebird Day at Champoeg Park**  
June 19, 2010

**Fall Wrap Up**  
September 18, 2010

**NABS 2010 Annual Meeting, Burlington,  
Ontario, Canada**  
September 9-12, 2010

-by Scott Morrison

A white and blue Starliner motorhome is parked in a driveway. To the left is a small yellow shed, and to the right is a white garage with a stone pillar. A large white arrow points from the shed towards the motorhome. The scene is set in a grassy area with trees in the background.

I took some digital pictures of the not-so-obvious box locations and inserted them into my Excel PBRP Nest Box Monitoring Forms. I found I could either put

I hope that this may be an aid to other monitors who are looking for better ways to communicate the location of their PBRP boxes.





## Bluebird Mystery Story

-by Zenobia Lapeyre, PBRP Volunteer Monitor/Bander

I am a bander. I know bluebirds. Turns out this season had a surprise for me.

My story really begins on a cloudy day on the 20th of May. Another bander, Lauri Kunzman, was banding a clutch of nestlings at Champoeg State Park. Twelve days later, on June 2nd, flowers were blooming everywhere and Lauri was banding another clutch of bluebird nestlings. The nestbox was in Wilsonville, a few miles to the north of the first. Two weeks later, on June 16, a third bander, Nancy Fraser was hard at work on a warm, mid-summer day. She was putting bands on a clutch of nestlings over on Wild Horse Mountain Road off Parrett Mountain Road, still further to the north of the first two boxes.

All of these chicks grew and left their nest boxes as healthy fledglings.

Now here is where the story gets a little strange. On the 8th of August, amid fields with newly baled hay, I banded a clutch of nestlings on Heater Road. This nest box is off Parrett Mountain Road, just a pasture or two from the Wild Horse Mountain Road nestbox, and miles and miles away from the two clutches Lauri banded in May and early June. Then I set up the trap so I could capture the parents. I wanted to read their leg bands to find out where and when they had hatched, how old they are and how far they had traveled. My efforts were successful but the results were totally unexpected.

The first bird to enter the recapture trap was a speckle-breasted female fledgling, little Miss May 20. I no sooner recorded this band number and reset the trap when bam! - there was Miss June 2. And then it was Miss June 16. It is not uncommon for the fledglings from the first clutch of the season to stay around their nest box while their parents raise a second brood. But each one of these chicks was a fledgling from a different, distant box.

Western Bluebirds in the northern Willamette Valley do not migrate, but they do form flocks at the end of the nesting season and move to lower elevations where the food is more plentiful in the winter. In the spring, males often return to nest boxes near where they were hatched, while the females are usually dispersed to territories a little further away. (Although not regular, it is not at all uncommon for females hatched at Champoeg State Heritage Park to be recaptured nesting on Parrett Mountain/Ladd Hill Road during their first adult year or later. And in fact, at this nest box, the female parent is a female that was hatched at Champoeg in May 2005, and has nested each year since then either in the near vicinity of the Heater Road nestbox or this box. She fledged two clutches here in 2008, and an earlier clutch this season.)

These female fledglings had dispersed okay, but why had they left their natal boxes so early? I may never know the answer to this mystery and it really bugs me! So, I am sharing it with you. What are your ideas for answers?



## Why Are Bluebird Eggs Blue?

-By Megan Miller, Crawford, Texas; from the NABS journal 'Bluebird', summer of 2004



Like so many strange and wonderful things in nature, the color of bluebirds' eggs is driven by genetics. Blue genes, you might say. Or, perhaps we shouldn't go there . . . but go on.

A female bluebird hatches with the ability to start producing ova. Interestingly, she has only one ovary—the left one. It is believed that the right ovary, while present, does not develop in order to save weight in flight. As the bird matures, she begins to produce the yolk that will enshroud and nourish the embryo as it incubates inside the egg beneath her in the nest.

When sexually mature at about one year, the female bluebird may mate with more than one male per breeding

season. The ova are fertilized and travel through the oviduct. Albumen (egg white) is added in layers, and chalazae form. Chalazae are specialized “ropes” of albumen whose function is to stabilize the egg within the shell. The shell is created last, also in layers, and during its formation glands add the familiar blue pigment. The pigment, known as biliverdin, is created from bile.

Here's where genetics step in: not all bluebirds are capable of adding the pigment. It is estimated (for Eastern Bluebirds) that as much as 5 per cent of the eggs emerge white. Most monitors who have been on Western Bluebird nestbox trails have seen at least one instance of bluebirds laying white rather than blue eggs.

Shell color does not indicate whether a female chick will herself be a white or a blue egg layer, as white egg layers do not regularly pass the gene anomaly to their offspring. Nor does the shell color predict hatching of a white bluebird. White eggs and blue eggs both generally contain healthy blue birds.

Albinism can and does occur in bluebirds. Albino birds of any species are at special risk in the wild—they are more easily seen by predators and tend to have impaired hearing and eyesight, and feathers of lesser quality.

To return to the question, “Why are bluebird eggs blue?” Some authorities say the blue color blends well and helps hide the eggs in the dappled light of a nesting cavity, so natural selection has favored the development of the pigmentation to favor this color. A 7-year-old authority of my acquaintance says they're blue because there are so few of them. Whatever the reason, blue eggs are just another reason that we love bluebirds.



## Annual Donation Request

All of us as individuals and as supporters of not-for-profit organizations are evaluating how we distribute resources. PBRP is working hard to evaluate our expenses. We plan to continue to seek ways to make our funds work hard and work smarter. One effort we have already shared is an electronic alternative to the biennial printed newsletter distribution by U.S. Mail. Thank you to those of you who expressed willingness to change to electronic notification of the availability of the newsletter on our website. We ask that others who are able make this change in order to use our funds directly for bluebird conservation.

In this newsletter, you will find an addressed envelope to return with your financial support for Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project. As you know, our organization is a non-profit 501[C][3] organization run entirely by volunteers, and we ask no payment of annual membership fees. We rely entirely on your love of bluebirds and your generosity to continue our work. Thank you so much.

– *The volunteers from Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project*

-----clip here-----

*Yes! I want to help support continuing the Western Bluebird recovery work of the Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project!*

I have enclosed my check for:

☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other amount



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

*We are also in need of volunteers to monitor bluebird nestbox routes. If you are interested, please visit our website at [www.prescottbluebird.org](http://www.prescottbluebird.org) for more information.*



Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project  
PO Box 1469  
Sherwood, OR 97140

**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
SHERWOOD, OR 97140  
PERMIT NO. 3

BOX TO SHOW PLACEMENT OF  
ADDRESS LABEL

**Thank you to:**



*Connect with Nature!*

**Clackamas Promenade**  
8960 S.E. Sunnyside Road  
(503) 496-0908

**East Vancouver**  
915 S.E. 164<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
(360) 944-6548

**Northeast Portland**  
1419 N.E. Fremont St.  
(503) 445-2699

**Wood Village Town Cntr**  
22741 N.E. Park Lane  
(503) 661-4944

**Beaverton Town Square**  
11429 S.W. Beaverton-Hillsdale  
(503) 626-0949

**Vancouver**  
8101 N.E. Parkway Drive  
(360) 253-5771

**Lower Boones Ferry Rd.**  
16949 S.W. 65<sup>th</sup> Ave  
(503) 635-2044

[www.backyardbirdshop.com](http://www.backyardbirdshop.com)



## **Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge**

19256 S.W. Pacific Highway  
PO Box 1306  
Sherwood, OR 97140  
Phone: 503-625-5944

<http://www.fws.gov/tualatinriver/>