



Photo Credit ~ Laurie Frajola

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PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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Newsletter ~ Fall 2014

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From The President's Nestbox

By Dave Flaming

By now most of you are aware that this season's number of Bluebird clutches were far below normal. At this time we don't have any answers as to why this occurred.

Our Board members, while attending the National Bluebird convention in June, learned that projects in Canada and Montana also experienced a low number of clutches. What makes our low number of clutches startling is that in 2013 we experienced the 2nd highest number of clutches in our history. On a personal level, I had 85 clutches in 2013 and only 38 clutches this season. That's a 55% reduction in clutches. The predominant number of adults captured have been 1 and 2 years old indicating we may have lost a number of older birds.

Following February's ice storm we had several reports from the Corvallis and Salem area of adult bluebirds found dead. Some of these were birds banded by our project. One farmer reported 15 deceased adults in the boxes on his property.

In May I discussed this issue with Pete Schmidt, biologist at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge. A subsequent review by the staff determined that their spring Songbird counts were at 40% of the 10- year average. In 2013 the refuge had 11 clutches of Bluebirds while this year there were only 3 clutches.

We won't know specific banding numbers for this season until everyone submits their reports in September. However, early estimates indicate that the number of Bluebird nestlings banded will be close to 750 as compared to last year's number of 1,706.

With the close of this season, I wish to thank everyone, homeowners, monitors, and banders, for all your dedicated work this season.

Refrain for the 2014 nesting season

(Submitted by Debbie Dale, Friends of the Tualatin National Wildlife Refuge, bluebird monitor)

The caw of the crow, the screech of the hawk . .

I walk to the box and give it a knock.

It's lovely little blues I am hoping to spy;

The nests with the feathers
almost make me want to cry.



In Memoriam: Brenda McGowan, Founding Member of PBRP

Brenda responded to a request to the Audubon Society of Portland by Hubert Prescott and Earl Gillis when their dedication to putting up nestboxes for bluebirds in the northern Willamette Valley exceeded the time and energy that they had to monitor the extensive network of trails. She walked the fields, orchards, farmlands, and properties of landowners alongside them and then independently. She served in many capacities as a volunteer, including monitor and bander, trainer, cheerleader for new volunteers, an officer and board member, and as her energies and later her health made it increasingly difficult to keep up with field work and meetings, she continued to be an advisor and supporter of the project and the birds. Her dedication had a lasting effect on our organization and Bluebirds throughout the northern Willamette valley.

It is with regret that we share with you that Brenda died June 13, 2014, having valiantly fought ovarian cancer for over five years, not allowing the diagnosis to stop her from enjoying and living her life, which she did with grace and courage. Brenda was a bundle of energy, enthusiasm, and a loving and caring friend. She was a registered nurse, and specialized in pediatric nursing. She had many enthusiasms, most of them involving the out of doors, travel, and music. She was an avid reader and life long learner.

Afterglow

by Helen L. Marshall

*I'd like the memory of me
To be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow
of smiles when day is done.
I'd like to leave an echo
Whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times, and laughing times
And bright and sunny days.*

*I'd like the tears of those who grieve
To dry before the sun
Of happy memories
I leave behind -
When day is done.*

We will miss her smiles, her insights, her compassion for others (including wildlife), and her courage. Brenda asked that the poem in the sidebar be shared with her friends when she leaves them behind, urging them to get on with living, not to grieve.

2015 Nesting Season . . . Call for New Volunteers

March 7, 2015 New and Returning Volunteers Workshop

Please set aside this Saturday morning in early March next year to attend this with folks who are interested in volunteering with our project. Those of you who have been monitoring bluebird routes can provide very helpful insights for potential new volunteers - much more personalized than the talk we provide about the birds' natural history, why they are in need of our efforts to help maintain their numbers, and the "reality show" mechanics of bluebird monitoring and field work. At the present time, the time for this meeting will be 9:30 until noon. The Board of Directors is reviewing the format of the meeting in order to make the experience equally valuable for returning and potential new volunteers, and the timing might be adjusted just a bit for that purpose.

Bluebird Day at Champoeg State Heritage Area

June 13, 2015

Mark your calendars to come and "talk bluebird" and songbird conservation with visitors at Champoeg next June. The program is on a Saturday. In past years, the hours were 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. We have been participants with the park and their volunteers in presenting our field work and data collection efforts as we help to support the continued presence of bluebirds in the northern Willamette Valley. In the past, the format has included an information table with displays, observation of an active bluebird nesting, and showing of videos in the Auditorium, as well as the very popular nest box building activity in the historic barn. The Park has provided a Junior Ranger program and their pioneer garden and costumed volunteer hosts.

In Brief..... Bluebirds In Our Territory and Beyond

In June, Nancy Fraser banded a clutch of Bluebirds in the countryside outside Oregon City. When the nestlings had been banded, the adults were recovered in order to record their ID band numbers. The female was unbanded, and was banded before release. The male was banded, and PBRP records showed he was hatched and banded in a nest box on Chehalem Mountain, more than 40 miles away from the location of this nest box. This is very unusual in our experience . . . males are regularly recovered nesting within 2 miles or less of their hatch location. Another unusual finding in this very unusual breeding season.



Photo Credit ~ Scott Peavy

Sherwood Monitor Susan Mates wrote: I have missed my bluebird route now that I am working as a fire lookout on a mountain east of Oakridge. This season, I was surprised and pleased that I observed several families of bluebirds being raised near the lookout tower. Last year I didn't see a single one, and I am wondering if the low snow levels allowed the birds to migrate higher this year, and if perhaps this could explain why there have been fewer nesting attempts on our routes in the Willamette Valley. I was able to enjoy watching the adults fly in and out of hollows (natural cavities!) in nearby snags. I put a shallow dish of water out for the wildlife, and one of the male bluebirds brought three new fledglings to try out my bird bath. It made me laugh to see them fall over into the water as they learned to co-ordinate splashing and bathing with their wings. How lucky we are to get to know these beautiful, quiet birds.

UPCOMING EVENTS CALENDAR

January 9, 2015 - 9:30-noon
Board of Directors Meeting

March 7, 2015 - 9:30-12:30
Spring Workshop at
Champoeg State Heritage Area
Visitors' Center (times may be adjusted)

April 10, 2015 - 9:30-noon
Board of Directors Meeting

May 16, 2015
Tualatin River Wildlife Refuge
Songbird Festival

June 13, 2015 - 10:00-2:00
Champoeg State Heritage
Area Bluebird Day

July 10, 2015 - 9:30-noon
Board of Directors Meeting

September 12, 2015 - 9:30-noon
Annual Meeting/ Fall Wrap Up
Champoeg State Heritage Area
Visitors' Center (times may be adjusted)

October 9, 2015 - 9:30-noon
Board of Directors Meeting

Annual Meeting and Wrap Up

By Nancy Fraser

The Annual Business Meeting and Fall Wrap Up was held at Champoeg State Heritage Area September 13. Business conducted included a reminder that a new board will be elected at our 2015 Annual Meeting, introduction of Board Members, and a summary Financial Report.

The two high school students who were awarded our scholarships for university studies in environmental sciences were introduced. These outstanding young people are Thomas Adamson (Sherwood HS Class of 2014) and Lorraine (Mamo) Waianuhea (West Linn HS Class of 2014). Thomas attends Pacific University in Forest Grove and Mamo attends Oregon State University in Corvallis.

Lauri Kunzman attended and spoke at the Sherwood HS Awards and Scholarship presentations. Here is what Lauri reported: "The evening of awards and scholarships was very interesting and satisfying to me as one of the "worker bees" in the field working for bluebird conservation. To witness the awards, the graciousness and gratitude of the students, validated for me how important it is that our organization dedicate contributions to the future of not only Western Bluebirds, but the environment in general."



Photo Credit ~ Greg LaHaie



Photo Credit ~ Greg LaHaie

and banding. Raylene is Program Director of the Bluebird Trail for the Audubon Society of Corvallis. We look forward to more opportunities to network with her and others in our state who advocate for bluebirds!

Beyond Mealworms - Bluebird Treats

Story & photo submitted by Betty & John Ballentine, Monitors

Last year we were asked to fill in monitoring for Rick & Patty Sorensen while they awaited the birth of twin grandchildren in New York. At one bluebird nest box, the parent birds always eagerly awaited the mealworms we left after checking their box. The box is located in an area where old cherry trees are nearby. When the chicks were banded they appeared larger and more energetic than those from other sites on the route. When we



cleaned out the box after fledging, the entire bottom of the nest was lined with cherry pits. It appears the parents fed cherries as well as insects to the nestlings. We had thought that bluebirds only fed insects when raising young, but it appears that some will feed fruit if it is available and of a size they can carry. The trees in this location produce very small cherries.

This year we had our own route, and this same nest box location was on it. Bluebirds nested here, and we were interested if cherries would be a part of the chicks' diet. Four chicks fledged. When we cleaned out the box, the nest was lined with cherry pits (and blueberry skins).



PBRP Scholarship awardees: Thomas Adamson and Lorraine (Mamo) Waianuhea with Nelda Skidmore (center), PBRP Board Member.

Photo by Dave Flaming

BLUEBIRD MAN - North American Bluebird Society Conference, Boise, Idaho

By Nelda Skidmore

In June three Prescott Board Members (Bob Burbank, Nancy Fraser and Nelda Skidmore) attended the annual North American Bluebird Society (NABS) conference in Boise. The North American Bluebird Society was established in 1978 by a group of concerned scientists and bluebird lovers as a non-profit organization committed to conservation of the bluebird. By launching a campaign designed to encourage citizens from all walks of life to put up nest boxes specifically designed for bluebirds, this organization has played an instrumental role in the bluebird's recovery.

The theme of the conference this year was bluebird conservation and citizen science. To showcase this theme the conference featured a film and field trips showing the efforts of 91-year-old Alfred Larson, who has been monitoring and maintaining over 300 nest boxes for bluebirds in Idaho for 35 years. The message being emphasized at the conference was that currently bluebird

populations are being sustained across North America due to the efforts of dedicated citizen scientists such as Al Larson. Despite the success of these efforts, bluebird conservationists must find a way to motivate younger generations to continue the important work of monitoring and maintaining nest boxes for bluebirds or the current level of recovery could be lost.

Al demonstrated the theme of the conference very well. He was one of the first citizen scientists to take up the 1978 NABS call to action. Al was nearing retirement and was inspired to return to the Owyhee Mountains where he spent much of his childhood. Al set up his first nest boxes for bluebirds in the remote mountains along the Idaho/Oregon border.

35 years later, at age 91, Al is still monitoring his bluebird boxes in the Owyhee Mountains. He monitors and records every stage of



Field trip with Al on the yellow school bus - 1 1/2 hours from Boise before we saw our first nest box!!! Pictured: Nelda Skidmore, Nancy Fraser, Raylene Gordin (Program Chair, Audubn Society of Corvallis Bluebird Trail), and Zenobia Lapeyre (Idaho native & former PBRP volunteer). Photo Credit ~ Ron Skidmore

the breeding process: nest building, egg laying, hatching, and finally the fledging of bluebird chicks. Al has banded over 27,000 bluebirds over the past 35 years. He also freely volunteers his time helping to educate and inspire the next generation of citizen scientists.

Besides the more formal agenda of the conference there were also many opportunities for participants to share information about the challenges associated with bluebird recovery efforts and possible options for meeting those challenges. The Board Members returned from the conference with a better sense of the recovery efforts across the country and the need to reach out to the next generation to encourage their involvement in environmental conservation efforts.



*Al Larsen at one of his nest boxes.
Photo Credit ~ Ron Skidmore*



Submit Your Caption...
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Photo Credit ~ Zenobia Lapeyre

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