Photo Credit Zenobia Lapeyre

PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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

Newsletter Spring 2017

What Good is a Dead Tree?

Originally published in Bluebirds Across Nebraska, Winter 2004, and reprinted with permission

Standing dead trees, called SNAGS, provide birds and mammals with shelter to raise young and provide raptors with unobstructed vantage points. Woodpeckers and creepers feast on wood-eating insects and provide "sawdust" for ants to process. Deer eat the lichen growing on the trunks.

Snags provide homes and fast food for wood-boring insects, ants, and termites, which help decompose the tree, releasing its nutrients. Even while rotting, a snag's roots help anchor soil and prevent erosion. Rich in humus, a fallen tree can serve as a nurse log for seedlings.

Death is a part of the forest cycle. In an undisturbed forest, it may take a century for a 12 foot, 3 inch pine to decompose but the whole forest benefits from the slow release of nutrients and by-products.

Some SNAG facts with major impacts:

- Over 550 species of birds, 300 species of mammals and reptiles, and nearly all fish benefit from snags for food, nesting, or shelter.
- Only 30 bird species are capable of making their own nest cavities in trees. Another 80 animal and bird species depend upon previously-excavated (secondary cavities) or natural tree holes for their nests.
- The insulation of a tree trunk home allows many animal species to survive high summer and low winter temperature extremes.
- Tree cavities and loose bark are used by many animals to store their food supplies.
- Insects living in dead wood eat thousands of forest pests that can harm living trees.
- Fish and amphibians hide under trees which have fallen into the water.

Photo Credit Nancy Fraser

You make a difference

The forest neighborhood changes, yet the way animals, plants and people depend on each other remains the same. Even as a tree dies, it continues to help sustain life to animal families and eventually to new plants and trees, and the cycle begins again. Hundreds of thousands of SNAGS would be saved each year in North America if people were careful when cutting out dead wood. Leave SNAGS in place to continue the cycle and shelter bluebirds and other cavity nesters, among other bird and animal species. Remember, "There's life in dead trees."

Volunteering

Zenobia Lapeyre, Former Monitor & Bander

At the Spring Workshop I looked into the faces of all the potential monitors and I wanted to say, yes, by all means sign up to be a bluebird nest box monitor, but there are some things you need to know. This is the reason for the information session, to present details of bluebird monitoring -- both the joy and the reality of nature.

Each nesting season we seek new volunteers to replace those that have had to resign their volunteer position in our organization. We are especially pleased when volunteers appear at the workshop and tell us that they live in Sherwood, or Newberg, or Canby or Wilsonville, and other communities more popular with bluebirds looking for places to build nests and raise their young. If you fit into the Bluebird Local job description, contact us at our website or Facebook page, and we'll send a reminder invitation next spring when we are about to hold the Workshop/New Volunteer Training.

When I decided to become a monitor, I thought I would be a sort of third-party objective observer; I did not realize how involved I would become.

I loved the early mornings in rural areas, the air filled with bird songs and farm sounds. I found myself singing "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" more than once - you know, the song that has the line "Mr. Bluebird's on my shoulder…"

The truth is, these birds are not Disney characters, nor are they pets. They are wild creatures with strong inbred instincts that will keep the species going. They were here long before our arrival and they will be here long afterwards. Our project provides nest boxes to replace lost nesting cavities. It is a deeply satisfying feeling to know that you have helped in some small way to make the job of procreation a little easier, and maybe even made the difference between life and death for a few nestlings.

It is a hard job for adults to rear a clutch to maturity. There are perils and predators associated with each step of the process, and the chicks won't all survive. Monitors can help in this process and maybe tilt the scales in favor of the bluebirds.

It won't be easy. There will be many days of misery. In the midst of the rainy season, you will be muddy from the ground up, wet from the head down, and soggy in between from tall wet grasses. It might help to remember that the bluebirds with hungry nestlings don't have the option of staying in bed; they must be out in search of food for an ever-increasing demand from growing nestlings. You will forget your own physical discomfort as you watch the adult bluebirds quickly gather your offering of mealworms to feed a nest full of hungry young.

You will probably make extra trips to the nest boxes during the extremes in our Northwest weather, to make sure the nests are dry enough or the chicks are warm enough or cool enough.

Photo Credit Zenobia Lapeyre

In spite of it all, there will be losses. The bluebirds are a link in the greater scheme of nature, as we all are, but the losses will feel more personal. There will be triumphs, too, and they will somehow overshadow the losses. When you see surviving fledglings perched on a fence post, accepting food from a still watchful adult, you will rejoice. And when the sun catches the incredible blue as one of the bluebirds takes flight, your heart will soar, too.

BLUEBIRD PHOTOGRAPH CONTEST

Get Your Cameras Ready!

Springtime is upon us! It is a great time of year to get great photograph opportunities. Why not enter your favorite photographs in our 2017 PBRP Photo Contest? Submit your original photo image, name, and phone number to: pbrp.fb@gmail.com for a chance to share with other bird lovers and win a great prize. Please be sure to check out our contest details for your best opportunity to win. We look forward to seeing your images.

Contest details:
- Contest runs from March 30, 2017 – July 30, 2017
- Winning image will be awarded to the photo that best displays: technical quality, originality, and artistic merit capturing a Western Bluebird in it's natural habitat.

Prizes Awarded:
- One $50 Gift Card to Backyard Bird Shop
- Winning image will be featured in PBRP publications with photo credit.

Official Entry rules/requirements:
- Western Bluebirds images only
- Open to all amateur photographers 18 years and older
- Images/photos must be your own
- All entries must be submitted with your name and phone number
- Only electronically submitted images in 600 dpi format to: pbrp.fb@gmail.com will be considered
- Up to five entries per person and/or email
- All contest entrants give permission of future photo use for all PRBP publications
- Submission deadline July 30, 2017, 5:00 PM PST

Photo Credit Gwen Martin

Avian Apothecaries

Source: Cornell Labs of Ornithology by Lillian Ruiz, a sophomore majoring in Environmental and Sustainability Sciences.

Aromatic herbs such as lavender, sage, and mint are all commonly found in kitchens, gardens, and in soaps and lotions. The plants' perfumes are intended to attract pollinators and repel herbivores. It is well-documented that aromatic herbs have medicinal properties. However, humans are not the only creatures to utilize medicinal plants; some birds are known to incorporate pungent plants into their nests.

Corsican Blue Tits use up to five different aromatic herbs in their nests. The herbs are strategically placed within the nest, with the average number of herbs increasing as the nesting cycle progresses. Researchers Lambrechts and Dos Santos (2000) experimentally removed herbs from nests. Within days, the birds had replaced them. And for good reason! The study went on to suggest that the "potpourri" of herbs can potentially kill or repel certain parasites and fleas, which in turn results in high body and feather growth rates in developing chicks.

Not only are herbs beneficial for young, according to Gwinner (2012), female European Starlings prefer nests with herbs. Males display plants such as yarrow, hogweed, elder, and cow parsley to females prior to incorporating them into the nest. Starling nests with herbs have high incubation temperatures, providing an energy-savings to the female. Fledglings from nests with herbs also had a greater body mass and were overall healthier with fewer mites.

While we aren't suggesting that you add fresh herbs to your nest boxes, it is fascinating to know that birds "self-medicate." Perhaps this spring, consider planting aromatic herbs in your yard, such as yarrow. Sit back and observe your feathered friends. Are they intrigued by your herbaceous offering? If not, you can always use the plants in your kitchen or for aromatherapy.

From the President's Nestbox

Greg LaHaie, Interim President

It feels somewhat like the start of a running event: Lots of pre-run jitters. Athletes stretching to relax tense muscles. Excitement in the air. Everyone waiting for the starting pistol.

The 2017 Prescott Bluebird season is also in its final days of preparation: New and returning volunteers receiving assignments. Checking and double checking the gear necessary to begin the monitoring and banding "race". The season will soon be officially underway!

I want to thank, in advance, all our wonderful volunteers who have agreed (many for the umpteenth time) to participate in our noble effort. I hope the season will unlock the answers to some questions, and is sure to excite those who enjoy seeing nature's wonders "up close and personal". We are truly a group of 'Citizen Scientists' making meaningful contributions.

One of our goals this year is to gather data to confirm the serious effects of nestbox temperatures on the mortality of bluebird and other chicks. We might be able to determine the benefits of nestbox design improvements.

With a watchful eye to last winter's prolonged cold spells, we will be providing data on overall nesting activity this following spring. Does a severely cold winter have an immediate effect on new nest starts?

So many benefits come from such a large outpouring of interest for our bluebirds. And let's face it, after a cold Oregon winter, we are as anxious as our bluebird friends to welcome spring with renewed enthusiasm.

So, let the games begin!

Photo Credit Zenobia Lapeyre

THANK YOU FOR OUR 2016 DONORS' SUPPORT!

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project owes its success to its donors. Every dollar you give helps us to help our beloved Western Bluebirds. To all of you, without exception, our heartfelt thanks.

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Do Bluebirds and Other Birds Breathe Like You and Me?

Based on material from: Smithsonian Q & A: The Ultimate Question and Answer Book on Birds—Christina Wilson, 2006

A bird's lungs, like ours, serve as a site for gas exchange, where oxygen is absorbed into the bloodstream and carbon dioxide is released from it. Birds need oxygen (as we do) to fuel chemical reactions that release energy. But the structures associated with this gas exchange are amazingly different.

Mammals inhale by contracting muscles in the rib cage and a sheet of muscle in the chest (the diaphragm). Birds lack a diaphragm, but do inhale by contracting muscles in the chest cavity. Mammals' indrawn breaths enter a 2-step respiratory cycle. Oxygen-rich air enters the lungs, where gas exchange takes place. Oxygen enters the bloodstream, the mammal exhales, and carbon dioxide is expelled before the next breath. It is an in-out system.

Bird respiration creates a continuous flow of air through the system instead of an in-out rhythm. A single respiratory cycle in birds involves 2 breaths, not 1, and 4 steps instead of just 2. It includes the lungs and also air sacs located in the bird's chest and abdomen. These sacs are linked to the many air spaces that run through a bird skeleton and function as highly efficient bellows to keep air flowing through the respiratory system. First step, a breath of air enters the bird trachea and travels through the main bronchial tube in the lungs into the hindmost abdominal air sacs. Second, the bird exhales—but instead of sending this breath out of its body, the air sacs contract and push air back into the lungs.

In the lungs, gas exchange occurs in a network of air tubes and tiny blood vessels. This air then flows into the air sacs in the chest while the bird inhales its next breath of air. Last, the bird exhales again and the air sacs contract, sending the now-stale air back up through the bronchus and trachea and out of the bird's body, even as that 2nd breath just taken is flowing out of the abdominal air sacs and into the lungs. This unique system extracts the maximum amount of oxygen from every single breath. Air is continually flowing through the lungs, and blood is being constantly replenished with oxygen without the downtime that occurs in the less efficient "breathe in, breathe out" respiratory system.

A bird's respiratory system enables it to sustain high-energy functions such as flight, and at the same time serves as an interior cooling system. Muscles used in flight produce heat and air flowing through the air sacs throughout the body helps remove excess heat and stabilize the bird's normal high body temperature.

Photo Credit Greg LaHaie

What is a Brood Patch?

Source: "Smithsonian Q & A—The Ultimate Question and Answer Book—Birds" by Christina Wilsdon, 2006. From Audubon Society of Portland, January, 2017 "Mewsletter".

A brood patch is a featherless area of skin on a bird's belly that is used to keep eggs warm. It is also called an incubation patch. Males and females may both develop brood patches if both sexes incubate the eggs. Nerves in the brood patch may help a bird gauge the temperature of its eggs and thereby regulate its incubating behavior.

A songbird has one brood patch. The patch starts forming a few days before laying begins. Down feathers on the patch fall out, and its skin thickens and swells. Blood vessels in the patch also grow larger. The brood patch becomes a heating pad that efficiently warms the eggs when the incubating bird settles on top of them and also during the days immediately after hatching when the female broods the naked hatchlings.

Grebes, pigeons, and raptors also develop one brood patch. Geese and ducks pluck down from their breasts to reveal their brood patches. Gulls have three brood patches. More than one brood patch may also be observed in different species of game- and shorebirds. Penguins develop one brood patch, which in the Emperor Penguin is under a loose fold of belly skin. Most albatrosses have brood patches that are rather like pouches and partly surround the egg.

Pelicans and their relations, such as gannets and boobies, do not have brood patches. Some of these birds, however, warm their eggs by wrapping their big webbed feet around them. Brood feet.

Bluebirds love water!

Landscaping To Provide Food for Bluebirds in Winter

From information provided by Sialis website, 2004 Berry Botanic Garden "Gardening for Wildlife" & newsletter readers

Bluebirds rarely eat birdseed. 68% of their diet is made up of insects: grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, spiders, and caterpillars. They enjoy mealworms. They may eat suet, (an acquired taste for them) especially during winter months. They also like the fruit of plants such as flowering dogwood, mistletoe, cascara, currant, sumac, . (Bluebirds will swallow dogwood berries whole and then regurgitate the pits.) They may eat fruit in winter (when it may make up 50% of their diet), fall, and summer; and also in the spring, especially if insects are scarce.

Consider modifying your garden practices to maximize the potential benefits for wildlife. General gardening practices for proper pruning & cultural care are applicable to native plants. To increase wildlife appeal, however, you'll need to modify some practices. For instance, delay fall garden clean-up until spring to provide winter forage & shelter for wildlife (one exception is to always remove diseased leaves in the fall). Additionally, switch to less toxic pesticides or eliminate pesticide use completely.

If you would like to help supplement bluebirds' and other birds' diet, especially during lean winter months, you can plant the following berry-producing shrubs, trees and vines. BEST BETS: Flowering dogwood, and blue elderberry, Cascara, and Indian Plum. Before selecting plants, consider the following:

-> Check with a local nursery or County Extension Service (especially if they have a Master Gardener), or look in a garden book to see if the plants will do well in your area and conditions. For example, in the Pacific Northwest, our hardiness zones in the area West of the Cascades and East of the Coast Range are 8 and 9. At the extreme eastern edge of Clackamas County, the hardiness zone is 7. The zone determines whether plants will be reliably hardy.

-> Consider cultivars that may be hardier (e.g., disease-resistant), more attractive, and produce more fruit. For example, 'Apple Serviceberry' is a hybrid that produces larger leaves (with brilliant fall color), flowers and fruit than either of its parents.

-> Consider the plant's other qualities: How big will it get? What kind of soil and sunlight does it need? Does it transplant well? Does it need to be watered? Is the fruit toxic to humans/pets (e.g., pokeweed, poison ivy)? Is it susceptible to diseases common in your area? Will it make a mess (e.g., serviceberry drops twigs, fruit from pokeberry can leave stains)? What time of year does it produce fruit? (It is best to have food sources that span seasons, so plant a variety.)

-> For plants that are dioecious (separate male and female plants), make sure you have at least one of each, or the female will not bear fruit.

-> The fruit of the plants listed may vary in nutritional value. Look at when they produce fruit, and how long the fruit persists. For example, blackberry plants will not provide winter food for birds, whereas Cascara and blue elderberry will.

-> Avoid invasives. Yes, bluebirds will eat the fruit of some of these exotic plants. In fact, one of the reasons their populations have exploded is because birds eat the fruit and then disperse the seeds when they defecate. But these alien plants can cause serious ecological harm, taking over whole habitats and choking out native species. Nationwide, three million acres are lost each year to invasive plants. In general, introduced plants are likely to invade or become noxious because they lack co-evolved competitors and natural enemies to control their populations. Go with native plants whenever possible--they are more likely to thrive in your area anyway.

Again, even though bluebirds may eat their fruit, the following non-native plants are invasive. If you are committed to responsible conservation, **avoid these plants, and work to eradicate them** if they are on your property. Also be sure to get the correct SPECIES - for example native **American** Bittersweet (Celastrus **scandens**) is not invasive but **Asian/Oriental** Bittersweet (Celastrus **orbiculatus** Thunb.) is extremely invasive.

Elderberry

- Autumn Olive - Elaeagnus
- Barberry, especially Japanese *(Berberis thunbergii)*, & European *(Berberis vulgaris)*
- Chinaberry/ Umbrella Tree/ Persian Lilac *(Melia azedarach L.)*
- Chinese Tallow Tree *(Sapium sebiferum or Triadica sebifera)*
- Cotoneasters *-(Cotoneaster franchetti)* and silverleaf *(Cotoneaster pannosa)*
- Dwarf Mistletoe *(Arceuthobium spp.)*
- Elaeagnus: Russian Olive *(Elaeagnus angustifolia)*, Autumn Olive *(E. umbellata)*, Cherry Silverberry *(E. multiflora)*, Thorny Elaeagnus *(E. pungens)*
- Holly
- English or Cherry Laurel *(Prunus laurocerasus)*
- English Ivy *(Hedera helix)*
- Honeysuckles, especially Japanese Honeysuckle *(Lonicera japonica)*, also Tatarian Honeysuckle *(Lonicera tatarica)*
- Russian Olive - see Elaeagnus
- Asiatic Bittersweet *(Celastrus orbiculatus Thunb.)* - orange berries along the length of stems - American Bittersweet is not invasive
- White (wild) mulberry *(Morus alba)*

Continued from page 6

One of our newsletter readers provided this information on plants. that are beloved by wildlife and do well at his Clackamas Co. farm: Red and Blue Elderberry *(Sambucus racemosa, S. caerulea)*. Red elderberry is an early fruiter, here in July, and is heavily browsed by Swainson's Thrush and others. Blue elderberry fruits much later and is used by many species, including pileated woodpecker, northern flicker, robins, many others.

Salmonberry *(Rubus spectabilis)*, a great early bloomer used heavily by bumble bees, long fruiting period, early, heavily used by thrushes. Likes riparian areas but doesn't seem to need wet feet.

Red-flowering currant *(Ribes sanguineum)*, another early bloomer, great pollinators plant, hummingbirds love it.

Cascara *(Rhamnus purshiana)*, my favorite, another great pollinators plant, abundant harvest of black berries late summer, early fall, numerous birds such as waxwings, tanagers, grosbeaks, flickers, robins, Swainson's thrush, and others love the fruit.

Salmonberry

Bitter cherry *(Prunus emarginata)*, another of my favorites, a late ripener with blue elderberry and Cascara, attracts fall mixed flocks of birds, locally is a tree to 30-40' high.

Indian Plum *(Oemleria cerasiformis)*, February bloomer and early fruiter, leaves are beautiful when wet with beads of raindrops, attracts spring azure butterflies and diurnal moths, beautiful little plum fruits loved by waxwings and chipmunks, very pretty fruit colors.

The article in the Fall, 2016, PBRP Newsletter included references for local retail locations that list Native Plants as part of their collection.

Photo Credit Greg LaHaie

UPCOMING DATES TO REMEMBER

May 20, 2017	Tualatin National Wildlife Refuge Bird Festival
May-Aug, 2017	At end of each month Bander reports to Data Base Coordinator Dave Flaming for all completed broods
After the last brood fledges	Monitors' End of Season Bluebird & Other Species Reports due to Their Banders
After the last brood fledges	Final Bander Reports & Reviewed Monitor Reports to Dave Flaming
September 9, 2017	PBRP Fall Wrap Up at Champoeg from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm

Bluebird Haiku

Submitted by Sue Lamb, Monitor

Springtime's rush of life
Bluebird chicks, a wondrous sight.
Feathered wings take flight.

What is haiku?
Haiku is a Japanese poetry form. A haiku uses just a few words to capture a moment and create a picture in the reader's mind. It is like a tiny window into a scene much larger than itself.

Traditionally, haiku is written in three lines, with 5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second line, and 5 syllables in the third line. Keep your eyes on the birds and the environment and try your hand at composing your own haiku.

Here's one attempt by your editor:

Raincoat, hat in hand
Another rainy morning
Bluebird lights it up

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