



Photo Credit - Gary Miller

An affiliate of the North
American Bluebird Society



PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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

Newsletter Fall 2018

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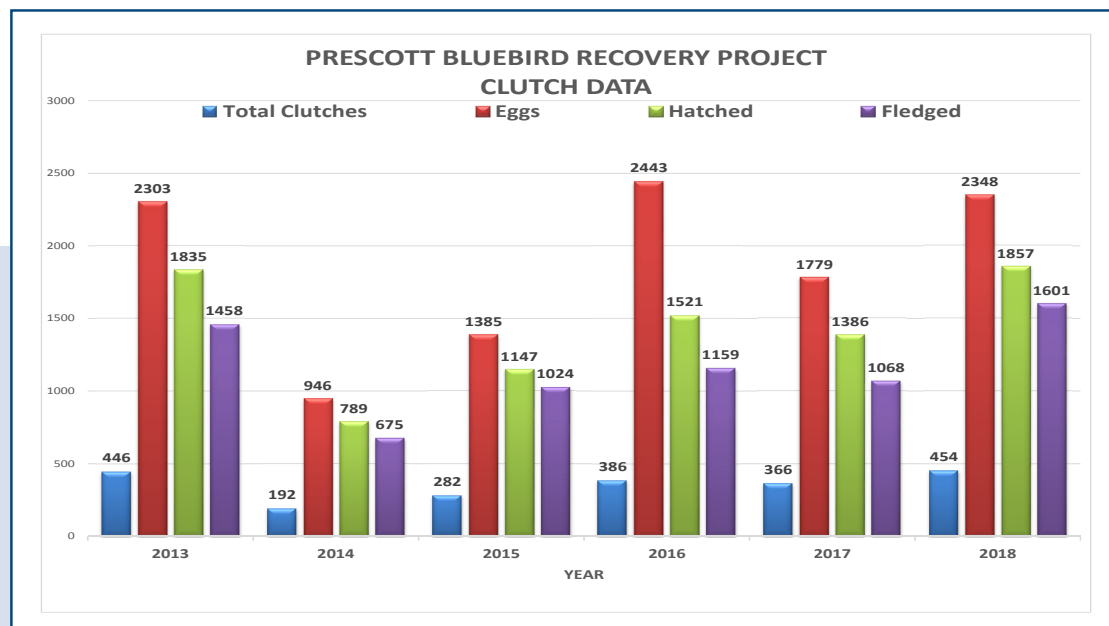


Photo Credit - Jeff Murray, Monitor

Tree Swallows? No, Tree Frogs!

By Nancy Fraser

After two successful nesting attempts with 9 bluebirds fledged at a property owner in Sherwood, monitors continued to check the nestboxes through August and a portion of September. They were surprised on August 8, to discover 3-6 tree frogs in each box. This photograph shows one of these amphibian users of our nestboxes on its way in . . . or out!





New monitor Sarah at first box with bluebird eggs - Photo Credit - Nancy Fraser

Spring Workshop Coming March 2, 2019

Will you volunteer to
help bluebirds?

By Nancy Fraser

The Saturday morning spring workshop is held for those interested in learning about monitoring and our Western Bluebird recovery project. Each year we need monitors on routes left vacant when some of our volunteers are unable to continue donating time and energy to field work. And each year there are

new interested community members who join our monitor team.

Monitors have an assigned route of nestboxes to visit once every 7-8 days, observing and recording their observations and reporting them to the detailed bluebird nesting data base. Data is collected, but with less detail, on other species using our nestboxes.

Monitors have a key role in the success of bluebird nesting. Further, It is exciting and often endearing to watch bluebird pairs select a nestbox and build a nest. One of the most wonderful observations is to find a beautiful cupped nest with one or more lovely blue eggs. And in about 2 weeks or less, you may find bluebird hatchlings in the nest.

Would you like to help bluebirds and meet interesting people among fellow volunteers and while monitoring your route? We would be pleased to have you join us. Save the date, and contact us from our web site (prescottbluebird.com) or write us at info@prescottbluebird.com to let us know you will be attending the workshop. We want to have enough chairs, coffee, and light refreshments for our meeting!

FALL WRAP UP AND ANNUAL MEETING

By Nancy Fraser

The meeting was held at Champoeg State Heritage Area on September 22. PBRP Board President Karrie Duckworth thanked all the volunteers who participated this season on behalf of the Board of Directors. Karrie also acknowledged the work of the board. This past year has been one of re-organizing after the retirement of a number of individuals who had been part of the organization and served on the board for many years.

Treasurer Lisa Fratianni provided handouts with 2018 nesting data, gave a brief overview, and answered questions from the group. This season's nesting activity began on April 4, earlier than prior seasons. The last hatch was August 20th. End of season reports not yet turned in should be submitted so final statistics can be compiled. Lisa provided copies of route information for each monitor and asked all monitors to double check the route information vs. boxes and any known

IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES

March 2, 2019 - 9:30 am - noon

Spring Workshop at Champoeg State Heritage Area
Visitors' Center

March/April

Begin inspection/cleanup of route & nestboxes

April

Begin weekly reports of your observations
on your nestbox route

May 18 - 10 am - 4 pm

Bird Festival at Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

May - September

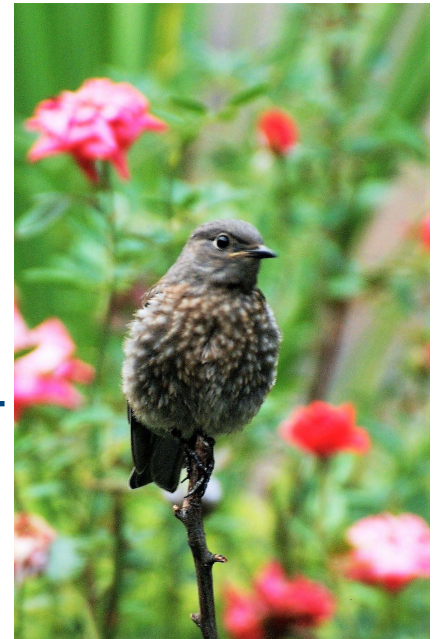
Begin end of month nesting data reports

September 20

End of Season
Reports to your
bander/team
leader

September

Fall Wrap Up
Meeting at
Champoeg State
Heritage Area
Visitors' Center.
date/time TBA



Bluebird Fledgling - Photo Credit - Scott Peavy

landowner changes,
and send corrections
to her for database
updates.

Lisa reviewed the
financials for year to date (January-September). We are on track
according to our budget.

She gave a status update on the fall newsletter, which is in the early planning stage. Nancy is looking for articles and would welcome contributions. She also gave an overview of the map showing the routes monitored by volunteers. There was a brief discussion about protocol to follow when there is a change in property ownership. Lisa should be given the new information so she can update the database. Monitors can provide the new owner with information about the project.

Gwen Martin announced the finalists and the winner of the photo contest. See separate article, Page 5.

The meeting adjourned and volunteers enjoyed a fine lunch of sandwiches and salads while having an opportunity to meet other monitors and board members, to talk about the nesting season and their routes.

Predators Near the Nest . . . Should Bluebirds Stay or Flee?

By Robyn Bailey, NestWatch Project Leader,
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, used with permission

<https://nestwatch.org/connect/blog/predators-near-the-nest-bluebirds-weigh-the-risks/>

NestWatch is a nationwide monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive. Our database is intended to be used to study the current condition of breeding bird populations and how they may be changing over time as a result of climate change, habitat degradation and loss, expansion of urban areas, and the introduction of non-native plants and animals.

At NestWatch, we often get questions from participants about what could cause nest abandonment. These questions are particularly likely to be asked by those who have spotted a predator in the area shortly before the nest was abandoned. It's logical to assume that if we see a predator in the area, the breeding pair has almost certainly seen it too, and perhaps has fled to safer ground. After all, predators are the leading cause of nest failure for most species of birds, and birds are therefore responsive to seeing or hearing predators in their nesting area. Birds can respond to nest threats in several ways: mobbing the predator as a means of defending the nest; abandoning the nest and starting fresh in a new area; or staying committed to their nest in the face of risk. Each decision has consequences and trade-offs that affect the evolutionary fitness of that individual bird. The earlier in the nesting cycle, the less "investment" the bird has made in a particular nest, so choices made during the early nest-building stage are particularly interesting because they reveal the potential "costs" to birds and their ability to weigh pros and cons (i.e., is the predator likely to return?).

The Old Rubber Snake Trick

Researchers designed an experiment to investigate the reactions of Eastern Bluebirds to a common nest predator in the eastern U.S., the black rat snake (Stanback et al. 2018). They used a rubber snake to simulate a predator on a nest box that contained a half-constructed nest, positioning the head in the entrance hole. The snake was left in place for 15 minutes, and the nest subsequently monitored for abandonment. Researchers were interested in whether bluebirds would abandon nests after just one visit by a nest predator, or if they would stay invested in the nest. To control for any impacts of human presence, they presented control nests with a model of a Northern Cardinal, a harmless, non-predatory bird.

It is difficult to study real predators because they are wild creatures that don't behave normally in the presence of people. While spooking birds with a rubber snake may sound mean, using simulated predators is actually a technique that has been used for decades to study predator-prey interactions,

evolution of defensive behaviors, and the benefits of cooperative breeding.

By limiting the study to nests that were still under construction, the researchers avoided potential harm to eggs or nestlings, while also allowing the bluebirds to make proactive choices (rather than reactive) about whether to abandon a nest. Nest boxes were paired (2 boxes placed 33 feet apart) so that birds could decide whether to stay, move to a nearby box, or leave the area altogether.

(While a single visit from a predatory species may not deter nesting birds, you should consider relocating nearby food sources that would attract predators to nests. Frequent visits by a predator would almost certainly discourage nesting.)

Surprising Results

The results obtained in the study were counter-intuitive. The bluebirds were no more likely to abandon their nest after being presented with a rubber snake than they were when presented with a cardinal on their nest box. The bluebirds that were shown the cardinal even mobbed the cardinal in nearly equal numbers to those that were shown the snake. In fact, the majority of birds in the study continued to build their nest despite this visit by a nest predator. This suggests that if they actually had eggs or young in their nests, they probably would have continued to attend the nest after a real predator sighting.

What does this mean? It's always possible the rubber snake was not realistic enough, and the birds did not consider it a threat, but this would not explain why one-third of them mobbed the snake or why 12% mobbed the cardinal, for that matter). Perhaps so many of the birds chose to keep their current nest sites because even a half-built nest represents an investment of time and energy that is not easily recouped. Furthermore, nest cavities may be limited, and a good nesting cavity on a good territory may still be better than a marginal nest cavity on a territory of unknown quality (even if such a cavity could be obtained later in the season). In any case, nest predators are usually common in most areas, and it may not make sense to abandon a nest if you're just as likely to encounter a predator somewhere else.

(Once a predator has caused a nest to fail, the nest site is unlikely to be used again in the near future. We'd recommend relocating such a box and attaching a predator guard if possible.)

When To Leave

A similar study was conducted in 2006 by Fisher & Wiebe, in which Northern Flickers were presented with a model of a nest predator (red squirrel) at their nest cavity. Flickers excavate their own nest cavity, so abandoning the nest and creating a new cavity would be even costlier for this species than for bluebirds. Like the bluebirds, flickers did not abandon their nest site after being exposed to a predator mount.

So to answer the common question of whether a predator observed near a nest box caused a nest to be abandoned, the answer is "probably not" unless the visit by the predator was extensive and particularly disruptive. In some cases, birds are known to seek out areas with predators for nesting due to their suppression of other predatory species. Eggs and nestlings may be abandoned for other reasons, such as inadequate food, poor weather, competing cavity nesters, or the death of the parent(s). However, parents are very likely to avoid a nest site that has previously failed due to predators (a reactive response); so if your nest box has stopped attracting birds, you may want to relocate it.



Photo Credit - Rick Sorensen

The Power of Citizen Science

Excerpted from Unhatched Eggs & the Power of Citizen Science, Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, Bluebird Tales & Trails, Fall of 2004

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (Ithaca, NY) has for years been involved in recruiting volunteers across the country to gather nesting data, as well as distribution of species at their feeders. The information has come from every-day people, from all walks of life. They report specific details about what is happening in their yards, at their feeders, and in their nest boxes.

Every-day people have become Citizen Scientists by being a part of FeederWatch, NestWatch, and participating in special count days.

A bluebirder in Pennsylvania wrote to The Birdhouse Network (TBN) a nest monitoring project that proceeded the much more comprehensive current NestWatch Project:

The bluebirds in my yard have finally left their nest of unhatched eggs after 18 days. This was their second clutch of eggs that didn't hatch. This has never happened to me with my recent years of experience with bluebirds. To have two clutches of eggs not hatch seems to me to be unusual. Is it? Are there any documented reasons in research as to why this occurs?

Unfortunately, the staff at Cornell Labs have heard even more ominous reports, and responds:

Just this morning I received a call from a gentleman in New Hampshire. He believes the same female laid a clutch of 5, then 4, then 6, then 6 again, and then 5 eggs, for a total of 26 eggs in one season, all of which never hatched. The man did puncture the eggs and saw that there was no development, not even a blood vessel, which points to infertility on the part of the male, female, or both. The issue of egg viability is very intriguing to Dr. Cooper and myself. We will be looking at our data base submitted by TBN volunteer citizen scientists very closely to examine geographic and temporal patterns of this phenomenon.

The truth of the matter is that we do not fully understand why some eggs do not hatch. It is also too early to say whether this is a new trend

or part of an old cycle that has been going on for years. In science, observation leads to answers but sometimes those answers can lead to more questions!

Through new research techniques that use DNA fingerprinting, scientists are finding out some interesting things. For example, some species once considered to be monogamous are not as faithful as previously thought. Extra pair copulations are being studied heavily in



Photo Credit - Tricia Niday, Monitor

ornithology, along with egg dumping, egg viability, and cooperative breeding practices. Studies are being performed on the effect of latitude on unhatched eggs without DNA testing, instead relying on the detailed observations of nest box monitors across the country.

Cornell Laboratories says that by simply monitoring boxes and submitting observations to the lab, bluebirds can help scientists study phenomenon such as unhatched eggs, the effects of pesticide, food supplementation, and nest box competitors on nesting success. We cannot study these topics without having a large enough sample size. The strength of individual observations pooled together from across the country cannot be underestimated. This is the power of citizen science and it will take this power to truly solve so many things we currently do not know.

House Sparrow Deterrent - A Failed Experiment (don't try this at home)

By Nancy Fraser

Mid-way through the 2018 nesting season a House Sparrow (HOSP) made an investigative sortie at a nest box where a 7 egg bluebird clutch had hatched within the past 48 hours. In an effort to spook the bird should he return and interfere with the nest and young, I attempted to construct something I'd heard of but never tried myself. Between midnight and one A.M., I gathered materials and built an amateurish attempt at a Sparrow Spooker (see picture).

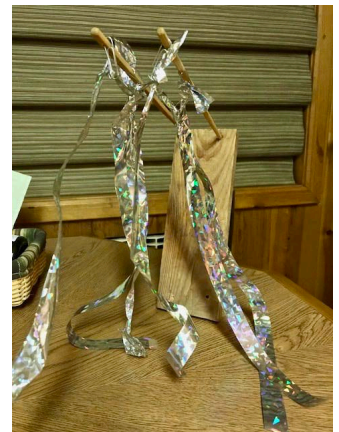
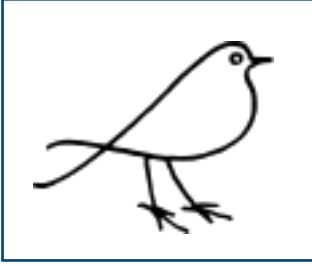


Photo Credit - Nancy Fraser

Two wooden chopsticks and board from a nest box taken out of service months ago, paper clips, and Mylar tape from my gardening supplies, and my trusty power drill were gathered. And the fluttery strips of Mylar that were to SPOOK the SPARROW were assembled. The instructions on the Sialis website suggested best success could be obtained by trimming the Mylar to a length that they just brush the top of the box as close to the nest hole as possible. After the installation be sure to watch the box for a time to ensure the bluebird parents are not spooked; they should continue to bring food and attend to the box. The reference says bluebirds are rarely put off by this contraption, but HOSP almost always are reluctant to approach the box. It also said this is most effectively used after the eggs have hatched, not before. Remove the deterrent after fledging. No sense giving HOSP a chance to get accustomed to it.

I cannot report on the success (or not) of this project. I notified the monitors that I would leave the device at the base of the power pole where the box was installed. When they arrived less than an hour later, IT WAS COMPLETELY MISSING. I'm assuming that walkers (disrespecting my creative talents) had cleaned up what they thought was a carelessly discarded plastic bag of trash.

The good news is that HOSP did not return and interfere with this nest. Enjoy this little story with no unpleasant endings so far except that my next Asian dinner, we'll be short a couple of chopsticks.



Beaky Bulletins -tips, anecdotes, volunteers' suggestions

By Nancy Fraser

I would really like to begin to gather material that would fit nicely in here. If you can recall something from this past season, send it to me at newsletter@prescottbluebird.com.

Or as we proceed into the 2019 season, begin making brief notes of ideas that could be useful for other volunteers to know about.

Here are a couple of ideas to help get your juices flowing to come up with some of your own:

■ Arrived at a nest box that had 6 nestlings about 4 days old last week. On approaching, I noted multiple swallows circling the box, entering the box, and preventing the bluebird pair from approaching or entering the box. This was not a paired box site. We put our heads together, decided to try obtaining and putting up a 2nd nest box on the power pole to perhaps distract the swallows from the unwelcome attention they were giving the bluebird box. There were several as yet unused boxes elsewhere on the route, and we quickly pounced on one and brought it back to the site of the ongoing battle. Quickly, we mounted the box on the other side of the power pole. Outcome: two days later, one of us returned to check and found a near-complete swallow nest in the new box, and the adult bluebirds bringing food to

the vocal nestlings in the bluebird-occupied box. There were no longer swarms of swallows, just what appeared to be a pair. Fast forward . . . 5 bluebirds fledged from the bluebird box and the swallows when next visited were incubating 4 eggs.

■ Can birds fall into a hollow pipe? Can they escape if this happens? The answers are Yes and No for the two questions. If you discover a box mounted on a hollow post, or your preferred box mounting technique is to use a hollow pipe with a big enough diameter for a bird to fall in, ensure that you place some kind of non-degradable cap or material over the opening. Wandering hardware stores is one of my favorite ways to come up with equipment or ideas!

■ Monitors had observed a nest with 5 bluebird eggs, and a pair of bluebirds nearby. The next week, on approaching the box, they saw a swallow looking out of the nest hole. Upon opening the box, they observed that the nest now contained a lovely bunch of white chicken feathers and 4 swallow eggs. What happened to the bluebird eggs? Several possibilities: Swallows overtook the nest from the bluebirds, broke the eggs/removed the shells (check on the ground under the box) and created a swallow nest with eggs; swallows overtook the nest, built a nest on top of the unhatched bluebird eggs, and started their own clutch. Would swallows ever lay eggs in a nest with bluebird eggs? Would bluebirds lay eggs in a nest with swallow eggs? What would happen? I've never seen eggs of two species in one of our boxes. One of the two species would win the box competition, and would in pretty short order break the eggs of the competing species. This might take several days, especially if the competition and egg laying were still going on.



Photo Credit - Rick Sorensen

2018 Photo Contest Winner!

by Gwen Martin

The winning entry for this year's Photo Contest was submitted by Rick Sorensen of McMinnville. Rick and his wife Patty have volunteered as nestbox monitors for about 10 years, first monitoring a route near Sherwood and most recently a route in the hills above Dundee.

Rick's interest in photography began in college, and he switched to digital photography in 2000. After retiring in 2012, Rick has been shooting birds, landscapes, and flowers. He said he loves our Western Bluebirds' "... inquisitiveness and the way they care for each other. Sitting with a camera watching them... brings me satisfaction and joy." That joy certainly comes through in Rick's photographs. Congratulations, Rick! We hope you enjoy your \$50 gift card to Back Yard Bird Shop.

President's Message

More than a few seasoned board members who had served many years at the helm retired after the 2017 nesting season. 5 new board members were elected at the 2017 September Wrap-up meeting. The new board met in October. Officers were elected, Nelda Skidmore continued as Secretary, Lisa Fratianni continued as Treasurer, and Karrie Duckworth reluctantly agreed to serve as President. After a very busy year for the board, the bluebirds, and for Karrie keeping up with her family's needs and her business needs, as well as capably managing the President role, she asked that the board recruit a new president at the October, 2018 meeting.



Gwen and Nancy tabling on Earth Day at Erath Tasting Room
Photo Credit - Erath Staff

In 2017, Dana Robinson and Greg LaHaie each served as board president for a time, relieving each other to see to family and personal responsibilities. In 2019/2020, board members Gwen Martin and Nancy Fraser have agreed to serve as co-presidents of the board. This is a good time to have this kind of arrangement, as the board continues to sift through the best ways to organize tasks within the board membership. While officer positions are required in our By Laws, there is no requirement that officers must take on more detail tasks than they can accomplish along with their officer duties. We believe that having the co-president structure for the next few years will allow us to strengthen the knowledge base on the board. There are many opportunities and good ideas for improving communication through the season for all our volunteers, sharing ideas and experiences, expanding the nesting data that we obtain and sharing them not just within our organization but making them available to the aggregate data about Western Bluebirds

other conservation organizations and science-based/research organizations can use.

Two vacancies occurred on the board after Carol Krueger resigned for health reasons and Nelda Skidmore left the board and her long tenure as monitor at Champoeg State Heritage Area at the end of the 2018 nesting season. At the October, 2018 meeting, the board appointed two volunteers to fill these vacancies, and welcomed Barbara Holland and Susan Mates to the board, with their first meeting to be in January, 2019.

Now a word about our reason for being, the Western Bluebird. The 2018 nesting season, with report data still coming in, appears to be the most successful for bluebird production since 2013. In 2016, there were more nesting attempts but far fewer eggs hatched and young fledged. A graphic view of 6 years' nesting statistics appears on Page 1 of this newsletter. For a quick review and a chance for you to say Wow! here are the 2018 numbers from the end of season reports turned in so far:

454 nesting attempts, 2,348 eggs observed, 1,857 hatched,
and 1,601 young fledged.

Monitors, thank you for all of your careful and thoughtful monitoring, property owners for your gracious hosting of nestboxes, and donors for your support during this just-ended season. It was a hot one weather-wise as well as bluebird-wise. Looking for a good 2019 in the field and in "the boardroom"!

Gwen and Nancy

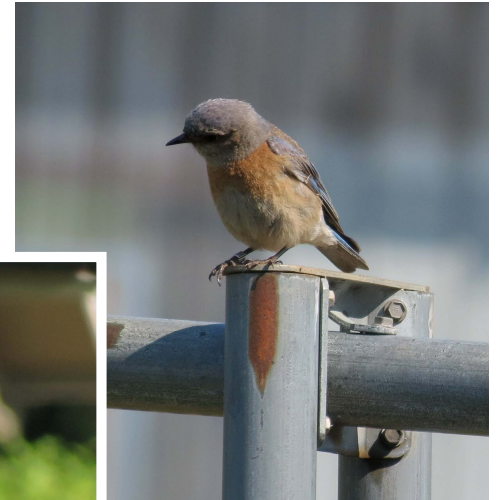


Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre



Thank You, PBRP Volunteers

Each season, our remarkable volunteers observe and monitor nestboxes placed in appropriate habitat for bluebird nesting. These dedicated Citizen Scientists maintain and may relocate nestboxes due to changes in habitat or activity in the area, maintain boxes in good repair, observe and accurately record the number of nesting attempts, number of eggs laid, number of young fledged, as well as the sadder events of nesting attempts that failed, and the cause of failure, if it can be determined. We appreciate all that you do and your donation of your time and energy on behalf of the Western Bluebird.



The Gang at the Pool - Photo Credit - Scott Peavy

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* = new monitors in 2018

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