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*Photo Credit - Benoit Gauzere*

## PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

Post Office Box 1469 • Sherwood, Oregon 97140 • [www.prescottbluebird.com](http://www.prescottbluebird.com)

### Newsletter Spring 2019

#### Welcome New Volunteers in 2019!

Thank you for attending our March Workshop, and for volunteering to help the bluebirds through nestbox monitoring, or helping with newsletter, repair/building boxes, tabling events, or nesting statistics.

Janet Carlson  
Marie Day  
Pat Fischer  
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Allhands (Phil)  
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(in memory of David L Peachner)

Dwight & Paula Cash

(in memory of Beula Durnford)

Rebecca Clark

Carl Constans

G.R. Cornforth

Lynn Dickinson

Roderic & Doris Diman

Janet Dorow

Dundee Garden Art

Don & Jeralyn Dykstra

Elsie Eltzroth

Michael Feves

Brooke Floren

Nancy Fraser

(in memory of Donald "Butch" Melka)

Pat Frye

Emily Gladhart

Leonard Grubowski

Patricia Gustafson

Peggy Guth

Elizabeth Hagans

Sheri Hallwyler

Darlene Hansen

Patricia Hanthorn

Juliann Hart

Ed & Fran Hepp



Photo Credit - Laurie Frajola

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Diane Nemarnik  
Mary Nyquist Koons  
Michael & Mary Ann Orth  
Michelle Othus  
Judith Page  
Scott & Lolly Peavy  
David & Kay Pollack  
Marilyn Portwood  
Jim Prosser  
John & Joy Redington  
David Reichle  
Richard & Elaine Rife  
Grace Schaad  
Jeannine Schmeltzer  
Scott Schroeder

Ardis Schroeder

Conley Scott

Thomas & Nancy Seidl

Wendy Shapiro

DD Robin Shaw

Marlene Shaw

Elmarine Shipley

Loris Shroyer

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Don & Dee Sitko

Chuck & Marie Smith

Mike & Nancy Southard

Tim Sparks

Rita & James Stanley

Jack & Deanna Sterett

Patricia Stolley

Deve Swaim

Bob Swanson

Sally Visher

Anne Voegtlin

Marilyn Walster

Onalee Wasserburger

Vivian Weber

David & Michal Wert

Rosemary Westphal

Jenny Whitmore

Zachary Zaret

Lee & Carol Zinsli

Lynda (Dee) Hill

Hose Family

Randy Hove

Beth & Jerry Hulsman

Wendy Hultengren

(in honor of Butch Melka)

David & Peggy Jeans

James & Peggy Kessinger

Beverly Koch

Evelyn Leniger

Pamela Lindholm-Levy

John Loacker

Phillip Lockwood

Bonnie Lowe

Jack & Martha Lynch Jr.

Ziggy & Tom Maier

(in memory of Donald "Butch" Melka)

Cheryl McCaffrey

Mary Ann McCammon

James & Sondra McIlhagga

Beverly McKee Trover

Marion McTimmonds

Leslee Meyer

Dick & Jane Miller

Deborah Mueller-Kruse

Jeff Murray

N. American Bluebird Society

Cheryl Neal

## In Memoriam

*PBRP wishes to recognize the passing of Elsie Eltzroth, known as “the Bluebird lady.” Elsie established the bluebird nest box trail in the Corvallis area in 1976, and her contributions to Western Bluebird conservation will be a lasting legacy. Elsie made a generous donation to PBRP, and we are deeply grateful*



*Champoeg Park - Photo Credit - Phyllis Pietz*



*Nesting Materials - Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre*

## 2019 Annual Bluebird Photo Contest

Grab Your Camera and Win a \$50 Gift Card to Backyard Bird Shop!

Spring is here, and the bluebird nesting season has begun. With it comes opportunities for photographing these engaging birds.

Photos will be judged on technical quality, originality, and artistic merit capturing a Western Bluebird in its natural habitat. The winning image will be featured in PBRP publications with photo credit.

### Official Entry Rules:

- Images of Western Bluebirds only
- Contest open to amateur photographers 18 years and older
- Submit up to 5 original photos
- By entering, you give permission to PBRP for future use in print and online publication.

Contest runs April 1 through July 30, 2019

Electronically submit your photo(s), name, and phone number to [photocontest@prescottbluebird.com](mailto:photocontest@prescottbluebird.com).

## How Can You Help?

PBRP is an all-volunteer group, supported entirely by donations from generous folks just like you who want to help the Western Bluebirds in the northern Willamette River valley. We accept donations by check through the mail\*, or you can now donate online at our secure website using your credit card or Pay Pal account at <https://prescottbluebird.com/donationform/>. PBRP is a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

\* PBRP, PO Box 1469, Sherwood, Oregon 97140 (envelope is inserted in this newsletter)



*New Family - Photo Credit - Greg LaHaie*

Tip: The best photos are clearly focused, high-resolution images with good lighting.

Our printer uses a 600 dpi format, so a high pixel count is ideal.

Is the camera battery charged and ready to go? We can't wait to see your photos!

## Notes from the Nest Box

Welcome to Notes from the Nest Box, a new, recurring column where we'll introduce our readers to some of the many folks who provide nest sites for bluebirds by hosting PBRP nest boxes.

Last year PBRP volunteers monitored nearly 750 nest boxes in a wide variety of locations. Some boxes are on public roadways, others on private rural properties. We have boxes in cemeteries, golf courses, orchards, parks, and vineyards.

One such vineyard property is Sokol Blosser Vineyard in Dundee, who has supported PBRP's Western Bluebird conservation efforts for over 20 years. The 11 nest boxes are monitored by Russ Rosner, Winemaker Emeritus at SB, who took over monitoring the route from his wife, Susan Sokol Blosser, about 10 years ago. Because he and Susan live on the property, Russ is able to monitor the boxes quite frequently, which provides the opportunity to closely follow nest building, egg laying, and chick development. And, because he (like all monitors) offers the birds mealworms, they recognize him and respond to his visits.

Despite his close proximity, Russ says he has yet to be lucky enough to witness young chicks actually fledging.

Like other monitors, Russ also has an "up close" view of the inevitable losses that occur in nature, and he feels the loss when a clutch of eggs or a bluebird is lost. Reflecting on his years of

monitoring, he said he's seeing fewer bluebirds and increasing numbers of other bird species, including some who compete for the same nest sites.

Highlighting their ongoing support of Western Bluebirds, Sokol Blosser introduced 2016 BLUEBIRD SPARKLING CUVÉE, a sparkling Brut wine with "fragrant notes of peach, pear, and citrus." Notice the beautiful drawing of a Western Bluebird on its label!



*Russ with Anna & Nikolas*

Asked what advice he would offer our newest monitors, Russ encourages them to pay attention and be diligent in learning what is going on at a nest site. Most importantly, have fun! Russ still delights in finding the season's first egg and interacting with these wild and friendly birds. Maybe this will be his year to witness young birds fledging!

PBRP is grateful for the support from our nest box hosts at Sokol Blosser Winery.

.....Gwen Martin, Co-President, PBRP

*A man who never sees a bluebird only half lives.*

by Edwin Way Teale

## Presidents' Message

The takeoff of bluebird nesting in the northern Willamette Valley is not as robust as in 2018 (so far). However, our volunteers are always excited and encouraged to see nests begin as wisps of dried grass, then a 1 inch nest, and finally a completed nest that could be 3-4 inches tall with a softly lined cup defined and ready for eggs to be laid. The process of producing fledglings occupies the adult birds for 5-7 weeks in and around the nestbox, and then several weeks with the fledglings showing them the details of sheltering, finding appropriate food, and recognizing predators or other threats to their survival.

You need to be tough and focused to be a bluebird!

This spring, we welcomed the largest crowd ever of interested folks who wanted to know more about bluebirds, more about our project, and whether they were ready to volunteer. The parking lot at the Champoege State Heritage Area Visitors' Center overflowed, as did the meeting room. Thanks to all who attended and especially those who signed up to help us help the bluebirds. Thank you also to our returning volunteers who helped out and our board members who spoke to the group, provided and organized refreshments, and answered questions.

This nesting season we are focusing on collecting nesting data, evaluating the condition of existing nest boxes, and enhancing our communication.

With the assistance of our field volunteers, we are in the process of correcting and updating our nest box locations in the data base, and the way that we manage our nesting data. We have been in touch with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY) investigating their Nestwatch Project to offer our historical and ongoing nesting data so ably collected and managed by our volunteers for over 25 years.

We have made a temporary moratorium on adding new nest box locations or re-opening routes that have been unmonitored due to insufficient volunteer resources. We will be re-contacting folks who have inquired about hosting bluebird nest boxes on their property. We will be re-evaluating routes for bluebird productivity and success, as well as mapping routes.

Exciting times!

Nancy and Gwen



Photo Credit - Rick Sorensen

### *The Bluebird*

by John Burroughs

*A wistful note from out the sky,  
"Pure, pure, pure," in plaintive tone,  
As if the wanderer were alone,  
And hardly knew to sing or cry.*



Female on Eggs - Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre

## Nestboxes - Can They be a Tragedy in the Making?

Based on material in NABS journal Bluebird, Winter 2018/2019  
by Susan Bulger & Gillian Martin, Southern California Bluebird Club

Installing a nestbox can be beneficial and a source of much entertainment, as the bluebirds forage for insects or seek out a tree cavity or nestbox in which to nest. Problems can develop when proven methods of helping them are not followed.

How can you provide the best environment for bluebird nesting success?

### **Right box, right place**

A safe box for bluebirds is about 10 inches tall with an inside floor dimension of 5x5 inches. The wood should be about 3/4 inch thick and the hole 1 1/2 or 1 9/16 in diameter. It should have a door that opens for easy cleaning and no perching post.

Small, thin, decorative birdhouses that do not have a door that opens, are placed low to the ground, and in direct sunlight, can lead to tragedy. If you wish to mount these unsuitable boxes, it is best to remove the bottom or plug the holes to prevent them from being used by birds. Did you know that native House Wrens commonly occupy decorative houses? Their highly territorial aggression during the nesting season is often deadly to other nesting songbirds. Bluebird boxes installed in House Wren habitat can set other songbirds up for failure.

A breeding bluebird pair needs about 2 acres of low grass. If your lawn and those nearby collectively provide this approximate amount, bluebirds have a good chance at successful breeding.

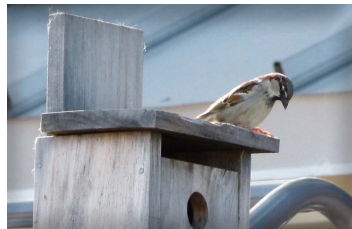
### **Two Non-native Birds Harm Bluebirds**

The European Starling is less of a problem when the right box design is used. The starling is too large to fit through the recommended size hole. The 2nd bird, the House Sparrow, easily fits the size hole needed by bluebirds. Sadly, it often kills bluebirds or destroys their eggs or nestlings. Birdhouses for bluebirds should not be used if House Sparrows reside nearby. Eradicating the sparrows is nearly impossible, and is only temporary.



### **Outdoor Cats & Nestboxes are a Deadly Combination**

Cats are not native American wildlife, and birds have not



*Deadly Threats: Cat in Watch Mode / House Sparrow / Raccoon*



*Nest Material Non-Regulation Box*

learned to evolve with these excellent predators. Millions of birds are killed annually by cats. Locations where feral or pet cats roam are no place to put a nestbox. If a parent bird is killed, some chicks will likely die because a single parent cannot feed a full clutch. Baby birds just out of the nestbox are especially vulnerable.

### **Shaded Locations Can be Life Savers**

In areas where summer temperatures can get very high, it is very helpful to place the box in a well-shaded area, because the internal temperature of the box can be substantially higher than ambient outside temperature. Prolonged high temperatures can affect the health of the adults & kill nestlings. Painting boxes a light color to reflect heat should be strongly considered where temperatures exceed 100 in summer.

### **Bird Feeder Activity near Nestboxes are Risky**

Feeders providing seed, nectar, suet, etc. increase the stress for nesting bluebirds, especially in small spaces and if the feeder is near the nestbox. Feeders can draw snakes, rodents, and hawks. Intruders & potential predators divert a lot of the bluebird parents' energy to defend the nesting area. If you wish to feed birds, consider using niger & safflower seeds, which do not appeal to House Sparrows.

### **Be Aware of Other Dangers**

These include all kinds of string, frayed blue tarps, ribbon, Easter grass, yarn, horsehair. When birds weave these materials into the nest, strangulation or trapping can occur. Other dangers include chimneys & vertical pipes. When the latter are 1-10 inches in diameter, they attract songbirds looking for a cavity. The straight, smooth sides of the pipe trap birds. Options include removing the pipe, capping, screening, or filling them with dirt, rocks, or concrete.

Bluebirds love water, and can become immersed in water contained in a vessel that has straight, smooth sides. Birds can drown in metal or plastic pails or buckets and in water troughs for pastured animals. If you put a stick that extends above the water level into the vessel, it gives the birds a chance to climb out.

Explore these websites for suggestions  
for predator guards and other resources:

[www.socalbluebirds.org](http://www.socalbluebirds.org)

[www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org)

[www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)

If a bird is injured or a nestling has fall from the box,  
find a certified wildlife rehabilitation center that  
works with songbirds:

[www.audubonsocietyofportland.org](http://www.audubonsocietyofportland.org)

503-292-0304 from 9:00 to 5:00

[www.wildliferehabinfo.org/ContactList\\_MnPg.htm](http://www.wildliferehabinfo.org/ContactList_MnPg.htm)  
(outside the Portland area)

## Does Human Activity Affect Bluebird Nesting?

Researchers wondered whether bluebirds change their behavior due to human disturbance near the nest, and if in turn this affected nestlings. They monitored adult bluebird activity and nestling growth at nestboxes with different levels of human disturbance. Extremes were nestboxes in national parks and other protected areas with little human activity and nestboxes in areas such as college campuses, golf courses, and public parks with a lot of human activity. And other locations with an intermediate activity.

The learned that when human activity is high, bluebird parents were just as diligent about feeding and caring for their nestlings, and nestlings grew at the same rate as their peers in areas of low activity. But in areas of high activity, adult birds spent less time preening and resting. This lack of self maintenance could take its toll on the adults, shortening their life span or otherwise decreasing their ability to compete for future mates or nesting sites.

## The Eggs and Us

Why do birds start incubating before they've finished laying eggs?

Bluebirds are not members of this group; they lay their entire clutch of eggs and then start incubating. They lay one egg a day, typically within 1-2 hours after sunrise. This gives them the advantage of having all the young about the same age when it comes time for the female to brood them for the first week or so of their time in the nest.

Most songbirds have a similar approach to egg laying & beginning incubation. Bluebirds spend less than an hour on the nest laying each egg. They are away from the nest for much of the rest of the day.



*Habitat - Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre*

of the delayed incubation start is more logical with songbirds, that are born naked, without their ears and eyes fully developed (altricial rather than precocial). Ducks and many shore birds, can dry off after hatching and stand up and follow their parent to shelter and safety within a few hours. In the case of birds of prey, that begin incubation with the first egg laid, the young hatch sequentially, with the youngest and smallest of the nestlings often failing to compete successfully for food, and perishing.

Theoretically, there could be increased risk of predation and microbial infection, as well as increased risk of damage due to temperature extremes but, it seems to work for them.

The advantage



*Bluebirds in the Rain - Photo Credit - Steve Page*

## Mouse Projectiles

Deer mice, nesting in bluebird nestboxes, create nests that almost but not quite suggest a House Sparrow. Deer mice are the main carriers of the Hantavirus. Hantavirus is not an epidemic, but monitors who visit and clean out nestboxes need to know how to protect themselves.

When following protocol and walking to the nestbox, tapping gently to alert a bird that might be inside to exit if it wishes, and standing to the side away from the opening door . . . something springs out of the box and disappears onto the ground or you may not even see where it went. Wow, what velocity that bird has!!! I wonder what it was? Suspect a rodent.

Don't disturb the nest, in case there are young. But when the season is over, and you clean the box, follow these precautions:

- Put on your mask. Carry a mask in your kit, should you ever need it.
- Use rubber, latex, or nitrile gloves.
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping. Instead lift the nest out using a spatula, & set it on the ground some distance from the box.
- Spray inside the box with a bleach solution (one part bleach to 9 parts water). wipe out the box with paper towels moistened with this same solution. Place the towels into a plastic bag, tie off, discard into trash at home.
- Keep the box open until it is completely dry. Wildlife could be harmed by the bleach solution. You might need to prop the door open and return after you've monitored your route.
- Bury any dead mice.
- Disinfect gloves & tools with bleach solution & soap and water before reusing. Discard disposable gloves.
- Wash hands thoroughly. If on the trail use a disposable disinfectant towelette.

Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project  
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Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project now has a Facebook page! Like us so you can stay in touch with what is happening with our precious Bluebirds. Find us at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/prescottbluebird>

### Mailing List Message:

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or write to us at:

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