

PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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Photo Credit - Mark Akerman

Newsletter Spring 2021

Presidents' Message

By Diane and Lyn

Welcome Spring 2021!

Lyn Burniston and Diane Harris are the new PBRP Board Co-presidents.

We are now in the process of opening our 2021 season, adding new monitors to fill vacant routes - without our traditional live face to face Spring Meeting.

Waking up to a beautiful spring day in March of 2021. It seems like such a long time since March of 2020.

Our masks are still on; we are still self-distancing - but we are heading out to a wonderful new nesting season.

2020 was a very unusual and stressful year for bluebird monitors. We generally start to clean out our boxes and spruce up our sites mid March. And in mid March, PBRP's monitoring program had to be paused, accepting the state and local orders. It was not until June 1st that we were able (with the consent of our landowners) to resume our fieldwork.



Female on nest with eggs - Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre

By the time we safely resumed, with masks and self - distancing, we began to check out our nest boxes. Many of our bluebirds (ignoring the pandemic) were well into their first brood. Still, we sanitized many times, before, during and after our encounters with gate latches, knobs, key pads and boxes.

At the end of the season, the results were very much in the normal range. And the take away - as we hesitated, wiped and worried - THE BLUEBIRDS DID NOT NOTICE ANY CHANGE!

Diane and Lyn

Thank you one and all!

In these difficult times, it is heartwarming to see our donors continuing to make it possible for us to do our work making space and place for bluebirds to nest successfully.

— We are so grateful —

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Photo Credit - Stephen Page

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Notes from the Nest Box

by Gwen Martin

At the end of 2020 we received an email from a young woman who offered us an opportunity we couldn't pass up. She asked if we'd be interested in partnering with her on her Eagle Scout Project. In scouting terms, we would be the "beneficiary organization." Our response was an unqualified "YES!"

Rachel is a member of Troop 5339 in Beaverton. Her project goal is to build and install Bluebird nest boxes for PBRP. In our early conversations, Rachel explained that she has loved birds from an early age, and she earned her Bird Study Merit Badge last summer. During that process she learned about PBRP and subsequently selected us for her Eagle Scout project. Throughout her scouting experience, Rachel has been inspired by her two older brothers who also made their way through the scouting program and earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

For those unfamiliar, Eagle Scout is the highest rank attainable in scouting and is a noteworthy accomplishment. It fulfills the scout's oath "to help other people at all times" and is intended to teach and develop leadership skills. Pandemic restrictions add extra complexity to Rachel's project, but she is a determined and confident young woman. PBRP is honored to be part of this prestigious experience.

The nest boxes Rachel donates to PBRP will be used to replace aged, worn-out nest boxes. These will be a welcome and valued contribution to our ongoing effort to maintain the over 700 nest boxes we monitor each year. We look forward to sharing an update with you in the Fall newsletter on Rachel's Eagle Scout Project.



Rachel with sash

2021 Fall Wrap Up Meeting

From the Board



Photo Credit - Betty Ballentine

Usually, we'd use this space to make a "Save the Date" announcement for our annual celebratory end of nesting season meeting. It also serves as the official Annual Meeting required of non-profits. We swap stories from the summer months of monitoring and have lunch – think picnic on folding chairs with electric lights and no bugs! WE want to gather this fall; Champoeg staff would love to host us again, but of course, no one can predict what state guidelines will be by then. So for now, we'll hope we can gather this fall, and if we can, we will be sure to let everyone know. Meanwhile, enjoy the bluebirds and all the surprises and delights that come with observing them.

We Need Wood for Nest Box Construction

A large percentage of boxes has deteriorated and replacements are needed. Can you help? Our nest box inventory has dwindled, and we need a supply of donated weather resistant wood or lumber. We can arrange pick up of suitable material.



Photo Credit - Stephen Page

Do you know someone who lost outdoor furniture, a fence or an outbuilding to the ice storm? Is the wood weather resistant (cedar, redwood, juniper or teak), of the type that will make sturdy nest boxes? We can also use hardwoods such as oak, walnut, and mahogany. Would the owner be willing to donate the wood? Contact us by sending E mail to info@prescottbluebird.com.



Photo Credit - Richard Sorensen

Approaching Bluebird Time

By Sarah Hatfield

It's not quite spring, not by the calendar, anyway, but the signs are here. The daffodils have opened this week, and the very first cherry blossoms have started to bloom. The days are getting longer.

Every morning
I hear birdsongs
getting louder.
The woodpeckers
have started their
ritual tappings
and the number
and diversity
of songbirds at
my feeders has
increased. I don't
have bluebirds in
my neighborhood,
but I am starting to

see photos of them on social media, and I can't help but smile. In just a few weeks we get to return to our monitoring route and see them in person. Wednesdays will once again be our "Bluebird Day".

I will go through the "kit" we take with us when we are monitoring and make sure we have what we may need. There's a mirror for observing what is going to in the nest boxes and instruments for cleaning out the boxes after the winter. A bar of soap is a trick we use to coat the inside ceiling and upper corners of the boxes to prevent paper wasps from building their nests in the boxes. We have tools and a drill for making any repairs. I will make sure we have plenty of hand sanitizer and wipes. I will even set up a hand washing station in the back of the car. I will put together my observation worksheets, that while crisp and blank right now, will be weathered and covered by my scribbles by the end of the season. We will check our binoculars and carefully clean the lenses. And lastly, I will make sure I have our mealworms ready. I don't want to disappoint the bluebirds as I am pretty sure that some of the birds on our route think of me as "the mealworm lady".

Once again, this year will be different. Last year we were fortunate to have gone out the week before the shutdown and were able to clean out and ready all of the boxes on our route. When we returned to the route in June, we were happy to find several clutches at various stages, and evidence of one successful clutch that had fledged. Hopefully this year will be an uninterrupted season. We look forward to seeing the landowners we have come to know (socially distanced and masked, of course). Many of them can be counted on to let us know if they have seen any evidence of bluebirds, and give us weekly updates throughout the season. It's so nice to have their reports to help us fill in the gaps between visits.

It's always interesting to see what new construction has occurred since we were here last summer (and what new traffic issues the constant construction will bring). Of course, we can't wait to see the bluebirds and see what they do this season.



Photo Credit - Tara Baker

Bluebird Species Near Trifecta

New Volunteer Monitor Tara snapped this lovely photo of a Mountain Bluebird while on at the 3 Crabs Estuary, Dungeness, Washington (Olympic Peninsula) just last month.

After having seen a beautiful male Western Bluebird at the very first nest box site she visited on the orientation to her route, this is species two of a bluebird trifecta. Just the Eastern Bluebird to go for the prize, Tara!

From the Bluebird Trails

Monitors visiting their route for the first time this season reported two pairs of bluebirds had claimed or were hanging around boxes at Knudsen Vineyard in Dundee. There are three nest box locations on the property; bluebird pairs were observed at two of them. One site is near the Tasting Room, but was relocated at the end of last season due to construction. Apparently the birds had no trouble finding their accustomed box in a slightly altered location. No nest building yet, but monitors have their pencils/mobile phones poised to record the event.



Photo Credit - Unknown

Another Dundee monitor team on their route on March 10 found bluebird pairs hanging out around nest boxes at 4 out of 7 nest box locations. Stay tuned for bluebird fledglings!

Several boxes on the two Dundee routes already mentioned had very tall rodent nests, which were carefully removed. Pandemic masks served double duty to keep the dust and particles from being inhaled. Standing upwind when cleaning out any nest box along with masking/gloving is the safest approach.

Have you heard of Azure Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis fulva*)? They are a subspecies of the Eastern Bluebird, and their range is limited to northern Mexico and SE Arizona. The birds are found primarily in the Patagonia and Huachuca Mountains. Due to its strict habitat requirements, the Azure Bluebird is listed by Arizona Game & Fish as a "Species of Greatest Conservation Need". Bluebird trails and boxes exist all around the U.S., but not in southeast Arizona. In partnership with the Sonoita Wine Guild and other organizations, Tucson Audubon has launched an Azure Bluebird conservation project. See Tucson Audubon website: tucsonaudubon.org.



Photo Credit - Wendall Belknap

On a beautiful sunny day, a new monitor enjoying her first look at her route in the Wilsonville area was talking with a landowner from an adjacent property. Suddenly, there was very loud metallic drumming on a downspout of the nearby home. Three people who love birds, standing there without binoculars to identify the bird . . . clearly a woodpecker of some kind announcing its presence to females of the species. Another delightful sign of spring, as if sighting a male bluebird at the first nest box location visited hadn't already brought some magic to the day. We agreed the best we could see was an entirely red head, and a body with black and white pattern. It looked to be about the size of a robin or jay, but not so plump. And the answer is: a male Red Breasted Sapsucker. I don't know if any ornithologist or recreational birder knows why it is named red breasted rather than red headed. The breast is actually just a wash of red that mellows into a yellowish color. Great bird!

Give Me Shelter: Paper Wasps in Nest Boxes

By Nancy Fraser,

based on an idea from NABS Journal BLUEBIRD Volume 43 No. 1,
Winter 2020-2021 Authors: Christine Boran & Anne Little

There are 2 species of paper wasp that may be encountered in bird boxes. Both are able to sting, one is the more aggressive and also more successful in keeping their colonies growing. The native paper wasp (*Polistes fuscatus*) is docile and relatively easy to remove from boxes. The non-native “European” variety (*Polistes dominula*) is the most likely to sting, and can and will sting repeatedly.

Both species have the typical “wasp waist” body shape with a narrower line between the thorax and abdomen. The native paper wasp species is primarily dark brown in color with a few white lines on the thorax.

Tips for discouraging wasp nests in nest boxes:

- Leave the nest alone and remove it once the weather gets cold in winter.
- Remove the nest when it is dark & wasps are less active; destroy it.
- Prevent attachment of the wasp nest by coating the ceiling & high corners of boxes BEFORE the nesting season begins using a bar of mild chemical, perfume free soap such as Ivory.
- Alternately, prevent nest attachment by painting a thin layer of a chemical and scent free detergent on the ceiling and high corners of the box with a brush. Put several layers of paper towels on the box floor to absorb excess soap that might drip.

The more aggressive European wasps are black with distinctive yellow markings. Their appearance is very similar to the insects we know as Yellowjackets, and they share the same aggressive personality. Destroying wasps by crushing can release pheromones that attract other angry wasps.

Fertilized paper wasp queens of either species shelter in covered or protected areas during the winter (most of the other adults die before or during the winter).

The queens emerge

in spring ready to build a nest and lay their eggs. Again they look for shelter, and build their papery many-celled nests in sheltered, dark areas— under structural eaves, inside vent pipes, inside gas grills, wall voids, under decks, and on ceilings and upper corners of nest boxes. This typically happens in March/April. You might notice this is just about the time that bluebirds begin to claim nest boxes and think about building their own nests. Bluebirds are not likely to share the same shelter where they will lay eggs and raise young with these insects. Presence of wasp nests are counterproductive for bluebird nesting success. Removal of the wasp nest carries a significant risk of the good samaritan being stung. In our spring inspection and preparation of nest boxes for bluebirds we take preventative measures. (See side panel above)



Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre

The Spring Workshop That Wasn't

Each spring PBRP hosts a Spring Workshop at Champoeg State Heritage Area. It serves as our annual recruiting event for new volunteers needed to replace retiring route monitors. It also gives us an opportunity to educate the public who may attend to learn more about the Western Bluebirds that grace our part of the Willamette Valley. Returning monitors come to see old friends, get updates from the Board, and share their communal excitement to begin another season of monitoring their routes and observing the nesting cycle of our beloved Bluebirds. Because of continuing restrictions on indoor gatherings due to the pandemic, we didn't host a workshop this year. We missed seeing our returning monitors. We missed sharing each other's anticipation at returning to fieldwork. A silver lining, though, is that most volunteers are returning. As a result, we have only a few routes open, and we've been fortunate to receive emails from several potential volunteers to fill those spots. PBRP will continue to follow state guidelines relating to the pandemic, but we are eager and ready to resume monitoring. If you're a volunteer, know that the Board of Directors enthusiastically welcomes you back. If you're a nest box host, know that your monitor will be visiting soon to clean out nest boxes and prepare for the nesting season. It's time to visit our 700-plus nest boxes.

10 Ways To Improve Your Monitoring Day *

Based on an article by Dave Flaming

* Note items 1,3,7 need to be structured with the current Covid-19 precautions: Wear a mask over nose & mouth; separate vehicles unless living in same household; keep distance of 6 feet; consider getting that latte/tea & pastry “to go”.

1. Treat yourself. Start your day by going out for breakfast or a latte/tea and pastry at a favorite coffee shop. Meet a friend. Tell them about the great pleasures and rewards of bluebird monitoring. And coffee/tea and pastry.
2. Tell others. Don't miss an opportunity to tell people why you are out on a cold, rainy or otherwise unpleasant day. There are a couple of baristas who greeted Dave as the “grande, non-fat, sugar-free vanilla latte guy” for years, then switched to referring to him as “bluebird guy”. Occasionally, they even asked how the bluebirds were doing.
3. Invite a friend. Invite a friend to accompany you on your route, perhaps a grandchild, niece or nephew, or a neighbor's child. Refrain from being a tour guide, pointing out everything YOU see. Instead ask what your guest is seeing. Take time to see your route through the eyes of someone else, particularly through the eyes of a child.
4. Pack a picnic. Pack a picnic lunch to eat on your route. I love this birding expression: “The best birds are sandwich birds.” Isn't it amazing how many birds we see once we lay our binoculars down and pick up a sandwich? Perhaps we can learn to relax and open our eyes to nature through sitting down and eating more sandwiches out there!
5. Practice listening. After eating those sandwiches, find a comfortable sitting spot under a tree or against a fence post, close your eyes and just listen for 10 or 15 minutes — not longer, as we don't want you falling asleep!
6. Don't concentrate all your attention on bluebirds. Many of us have “life” bird lists, and some of us even maintain state and county



Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre



Photo Credit - Zenobia Lapeyre

- bird lists. Why not a bluebird route list? How many different species of birds can we find on our route? How many mammals? Butterflies? Insects? Wildflowers? Farm animals?
7. Talk to your landowners. At times we seem in such a hurry to check the nest box that we fail to say hello to our landowners. Landowners are very important to the recovery of bluebirds. They are the silent volunteers of our organization.
 8. Unwind your route. Have you ever monitored your route backwards? Why not? We tend to become comfortable by starting each route visit with box number 1 and ending with 99. Why not get a completely new perspective of your route? You will be surprised by all the new things you see as you unwind your route.
 9. Use alternative transportation. Try walking all or part of your route, or riding your bicycle. (You are allowed to drive to your route, of course.) I once had a monitor friend who discovered her car was broken down, but did the route anyway, riding her horse (she lives on her route). She reported it took her 5 hours to monitor. The next day her bottom was sore!
 10. Have fun! By all means, have fun on your route!!

Welcome To New Volunteers in 2021!

Tara Baker

Fiona Carey

Steve Flowers

Katherine Kallus

& Sally Visser

Take pictures of bluebirds, other interesting subjects, and if you have a partner with you, ask them to take photos of you as you monitor, or of you and the friend or visitor who is along with you. Send them to the newsletter editor at info@prescottbluebird.com. Ask parental permission if you take photos of a child.

We use pictures in our newsletter, web site, and Facebook page to inform and charm the public and our volunteers with our field work and the amazing birds and people who are involved!

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