PRESCOTT BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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



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Photo Credit - Tara Baker

Newsletter - Spring 2023

Save the Date!

Fall wrap-up meeting

Our annual fall wrap-up meeting will be Saturday, September 23rd at 9:30 AM at Champoeg State Heritage Area. This meeting closes out the Bluebird nesting season and also serves as our organization's annual meeting, which is required of as a a non-profit. We hope to see many of you there.



Photo Credit - Sarah Hatfield



The following new volunteers have joined PBRP as monitors:

> Trish Ames Jeff Berthold Bonnie Dunning Sonny Lowery Michelle Mueller Rich Mueller David Sauer **Julie Sauer** Maggie Stock Pamela Woods



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Lisa Fratianni

THERE ARE NO BLUEBIRDS AT MY HOUSE!

Spring has fully bloomed in my yard. The year started off, as usual, with a flush of Lenten Roses, followed by delicate crocuses. This week it may be raining but my yard is filled with sunny daffodils. Right now, the green foliage of the Wood Hyacinths look better than any lawn, imho! The tree frog choir began this month and they sing me to sleep at night. The birds have returned on schedule too. The Towhees, Varied Thrush, Warblers have all showed up.... but not the lovely Bluebirds. They are no where to be seen.

Alas, I will never have Bluebirds in my yard. To see them I have to drive west past the urban growth boundary to the open fields of Washington County.

It's the annual reminder that habitat matters. My yard, like most suburban backyards, is just not suitable for Western Bluebirds. They prefer the open, grassy fields, dotted with trees. They traditionally nested in holes (cavities) left behind by woodpeckers. But as our human population, cities and suburbs expanded, the Bluebird population diminished. At PBRP we are here to help recreate and maintain the cavities that the Bluebirds need to continue to live in.

As an organization, we try to be very cognizant of what the birds need even though it may not always be what people need (or want). This is most true when placing nestboxes. We take care to evaluate the habitat, security and ease of access in any location. Here's a list of considerations:

Is a location suitable for the birds? Woodlands, wetlands, suburbs, intensively farmed areas, and anywhere house sparrows hang out

are not suitable for Bluebirds.

Will they be able to find food readily? Bluebirds are territorial and need enough space to forage for food without competing with other Bluebirds. Generally,



a 200-300 yard radius around a box is needed. Because Bluebirds compete with each other, putting up more boxes doesn't necessarily result in more Bluebirds!

We ask if pesticides are used on property. Since Bluebirds primarily eat insects, we avoid areas with heavy pesticide use.

Is there a risk of predation? If there are house cats (or barn cats) we will to add a baffle or some protection so they can't climb to the box. Or we will put the box farther away from a fence so they can't jump to the box!

Is it accessible for a monitor? We prefer places that are safe and easy to access, with little risk of injury for our monitors.

Also, as part of monitoring we evaluate if the area around a box has changed over time (for example, have trees grown up around it). If so we may decide to remove the box or change it's location.

Currently, Bluebirds are listed as a sensitive species by ODFW. Per the ODFW website:

"Sensitive" refers to fish and wildlife that are facing one or more threats to their populations and/or habitats... "Sensitive Species" are defined as having small or declining populations, are at-risk, and/or are of management concern.

The intent of the Sensitive Species List is to prevent species from declining to the point of qualifying as threatened or endangered.

PBPR has spent decades supporting the WEBB since the 1970s. We are proud to do our part to make sure there is enough habitat for the birds. With 52 monitors, 185 property owners and 756 nestboxes, we will continue to work to ensure that the WEBB will have plenty of habitat for years to come. I am proud of the work that we do, even though they still won't show up at my house.



Photo Credit - Carolyn Hyink



We would like to thank our 2021 donors for your generous support.
Our work wouldn't be possible without you.



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Volunteer Happy Hour

Have you ever had an amazing experience out on your monitoring route and wanted to share your Bluebird stories but no one in your circe really understands? We have a solution for you. Once agin this summer, we are planning a couple of get-togethers so that volunteers can meet and swap stories from the Bluebird trail.

These casual meet-ups are no-host gatherings at local restaurants and have been great fun. There are two dates at different locations planned. Feel free to join at whichever location works best for you (or come to both for even more fun!)



Upcoming Happy Hours:

Tuesday, July 11th from 4-6 at McMenamins West Linn Pub 2090 8th Avenue West Linn, OR 97068

Tuesday, July 18th
from 4-6 at
Schmizza Public House
15982 SW Tualtin-Sherwood Road
Sherwood, OR 97140

Volunteers at last summer's gathering *Photo Credit - Tara Baker*



Feed Us! Photo Credit - Sarah Hatfield



Ed Hepp with his newest box builder assistant *Photo Credit - Madeline Ishikawa*

Fitting the pipe over the post Photo Credit - Gwen Martin



Installing the T-post Photo Credit - Gwen Martin

PBRP Nest Box Mounting Post Design for Improved Predator Resistance

By Ed Hepp

A proper location is key to the productive placement of PBRP nest boxes. As Bluebirds favor open country, it is often necessary to install a dedicated mounting post when no suitable structure is otherwise available. However, wooden posts are labor intensive to anchor and are easily climbed by cats, raccoons, etc. A better approach has been steel T-posts but attaching the nest box can be difficult and some predators do manage to climb them. Also, in certain settings, bare T-posts are not aesthetically desirable.

A recently adopted post design utilizing an ABS pipe (a plastic pipe that is commonly used for drainage, sewage, and vents) over a steel T-post has proven to be both predator resistant and more aesthetically pleasing while being relatively easy to install.

In detail, a 6 foot long T-post is driven about 18" into the ground with a post driver. Then foam pipe insulation is tightly wrapped around the top and bottom 12" of the exposed T-post via nylon cable ties. A 75" long, 2" ID ABS pipe is then slid over the insulation wrapped T-post for a snug fit. The ABS pipe is then driven a few inches into the ground with a post driver to prevent rotation. A length of wood is then inserted into the top portion of the ABS pipe that extends beyond the T-post. The nest box is attached with 2-1/2" long screws that extend through the ABS and into the wood insert for a secure mounting. Finally, the ABS pipe is capped to prevent wasps or other critters from harboring inside the pipe.



Success! A new box on a new mounting post Photo Credit - Gwen Martin

Mealworms 101

PBRP provides monitors with mealworms, a food supplement that Bluebirds love. We offer mealworms as enticement to use nest boxes and as supplemental feeding for nestlings. Monitors often report seeing Bluebirds watching them as they approach the boxes in anticipation of a tasty snack.

Mealworms are the larvae of the flightless darkling beetle (Tenebrio molitor) so they are not worms but a stage of development for a beetle. If you look closely or let them walk on your hand (or slide down your arm into the sleeve of your shirt) you can appreciate their six little legs. They are not slimy, although at room temperature they wiggle a lot. (Some people don't like to handle them, and use a scoop or tea strainer to collect them to put out in the feeder. This also helps to sift out the wheat bran meal



Gathering mealworms to feed nestlings Photo Credit - Carolyn Hyink

you will store them in, so that it doesn't build up and cake in the feeder tray at the nestbox.)

Mealworms' survival is maximized by storing them at refrigerator temperatures, where they go dormant. Store the worms in the refrigerator, where they will last for several months. Keep mealworms out of direct sunlight.

Mealworms need food and moisture. Once a week, bring the container of mealworm out, let them come to room temperature, and add very



Photo Credit - Tara Baker

thin slices of apple, potato, zucchini, or carrot. Don't use soft vegetables or fruit. One method is to get them out in the morning, add the fruit that late afternoon, let them munch in the dark overnight, remove any unused food in the morning, and put the containers back into the refrigerator. Don't leave food in the containers when you put them back into the refrigerator or it will go bad.

If they start to smell like ammonia, sift out the "frass" (digested bran) and add fresh bedding (wheat bran). Dead mealworms turn black. Bluebirds don't care for these discolored and non-living items.

While some monitors can be a bit squeamish about handling mealworms at first, it soon becomes second nature. The joy that you feel when the Bluebirds come to feast from your offerings will quickly eliminate any "yuck" factor.

Spring Meeting 2023

On and cold and blustery Saturday March 4th, PBRP held their annual spring recruitment meeting. This was the first time the meeting had been held in person since 2020 and it was great to feel the energy and enthusiasm in the room. The spring meeting is traditionally held as a way to recruit new volunteers and gather and thank returning volunteers.

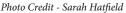
The meeting kicked off with Board Member Katie O'Toole welcoming the attendees and introducing the board. Master bird box builder Ed Hepp then took the stage and showed the his two styles of Bluebird boxes as well as the ingenious predator-proof pole he designed.

Board Member Michelle Harrington then led a slide presentation about the Western Bluebird. She explained why they are classified as a sensitive species and are a protected bird. She then went on to explain the life cycle of the Western Bluebird, covering everything from their diet to their nesting habits and how they care for their hatchlings.



The history and and goals of PBRP were presented by Board Member Gwen Martin. She provided an interesting biography of founder, Hubert Prescott and explained how the Project started with just six volunteers and has grown to over 60 last year. Next she gave an overview of what being a monitor entails. She outlined what responsibilities monitors have, from field work to reporting, and gave an idea of what monitors can expect to find while doing that field work.

Katie then wrapped up the meeting after talking up the summer meet-ups that the Project has had for volunteers to get together and swap Bluebird tales. She and the board thanked the returning volunteers and asked potential volunteers to let the Project know if they would like to become monitors.







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