BLUEBIRDS FLY!

\$2.50 per issue suggested donation

California Bluebird Recovery Program's newsletter

- assisted by Mt Diablo Audubon Society

- an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

for the encouragement and conservation of cavity-nesters - especially bluebirds - anywhere in the West

End of Season Reporting via Email SCVAS-CBRP Offers A Template Web Page

By Dick Blaine, Bluebird Advocate for Santa Clara Valley



At the end of each nesting season trail monitors send information about the trail, boxes, broods, date, and

counts of eggs, hatchlings and fledglings to the County Coordinator. In counties with many nestboxes, entering all this info is a tedious and time-consuming task.

There has long been the need to automate the process of "end of season" reporting. We are fortunate in Santa Clara County that the local Audubon chapter, SCVAS, is highly supportive of the CBRP and together we undertook the task of building the tools and a web page devoted to the CBRP. This is now incorporated into the SCVAS web site. The goal of this project is the automation of the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

The SCVAS-CBRP web page contains the following:

- Reference Material including abbreviations for cavity nesting birds, list of Santa Clara County trails & monitors, complete plans and photographs for constructing bluebird boxes and retrievers, information about taking care of your nestbox, list of internet discussion groups, guides to caring for and monitoring trails, and a monitoring starter package available from the SCVAS nature shop.
- Santa Clara County CBRP Results for the past few years

- · Links to Dozens of Related Web Sites
- Downloadable Forms to track individual nestboxes and trails, and the county and state reporting forms.
- Data Collection Spreadsheet (DCS) to be downloaded, filled in by the Trail Monitor, and emailed to the County Coordinator.

These forms can be printed and mailed or downloaded as spread-sheets and emailed.

An Analysis & Reporting Spreadsheet (A&RS) is used by County Coordinator to consolidate the trail monitors' Data Collection Spreadsheets. It checks for errors, analyzes data by trail, consolidates data for the county and prepares the CBRP Annual State forms, which can then be sent by email to the State Program Director. Alternately, results can be printed and mailed.

Trail Monitors can certainly continue to file their reports the old-fashioned way – using paper and the U.S. mail. But for those who like the efficiency of the computer, end-of-season reporting would look something like this:

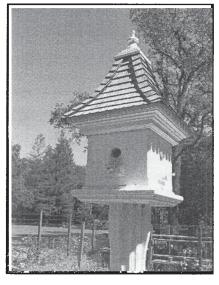
1. In March the County Coordinator contacts Trail Monitors by email to remind them of the approaching nesting season, that it is time to clean out old nestboxes, and that tracking forms are available on the CBRP web page.

(continued on back page)

Bluebirds Not Always Predictable

Most CBRP efforts involve "detached housing" for our feathered friends – single boxes for the Blues who don't like to be crowded. San Mateo County Coordinator Howard Rathlesberger was surprised and delighted to find an exception to this at Woodside Elementary School.

The school has a four-cavity decorative house in the students' garden area adjacent to a soccer field. The house (pictured below) has a fancy conical roof on an 8' pole. Howard reports, "We never thought this multiple cavity box would be attractive to WEBL's, but in fact, several of the 'condos' were occupied. WEBLs had built and abandoned a nest in one unit; the Oak Titmouse successfully raised a family in another. And a third house had a resident family of Blues. On May 28 we banded six chicks and fledged five. And the perches under the hole were being employed by the adults. Plenty of activity there!"



NABS Convention Report

Biltmore Estate Is Enchanting Setting by Howard Rathlesberger

We're back from Asheville, N.C. where the NABS Annual Convention was held. It was a good meeting with a mix of local speakers. Understandably, the eastern meetings do not attract too many westerners. In addition to Nancy and Max Grandfield, Anita and Don Marquis, and Jean and I, there was one other Californian from Garden Grove.

We were the guests of the North Carolina Bluebird Society, an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society. Their quarterly publication is Bluebirds Forever and their web page is www.NCBluebird.com.

This meeting included a visit to the famous 8000 acre Biltmore Estate, the family home of George Vanderbilt and his wife. The house has over 250 rooms. It is situated outside of Asheville and prominent in its Smoky Mountain environment. The approach to the mansion through the woods along a twisting roadway has blooming rhododendrons in blues and whites all along the way and visible in the woods - gorgeous. The edifice built at the end of the 19th Century was intended to be self-sufficient, meeting all the needs of its occupants. The estate now employs about 1500 people. It is a village in itself. It was elegant with many paintings, sculptures, and furnishings brought back from Europe and Asia. We have nothing in California to compare. We were pleased to have had the opportunity to visit.

The estate has a huge Bluebird trail system – all pole boxes in and around the meadow areas. This is also Tree Swallow territory and the boxes are shared with the Bluebirds.

An interesting innovation shown at the meeting was the introduction of a sheet metal double-walled box, double roofed with a solar panel which operated a small circulating fan. This circulated air through the double walls and roof of the 4" square box (Eastern Bluebird box size). Boxes are put out in the open there, but we have an advantage with (next column)

A Note from the Program Director

It seemed so short – that interval between the Spring rains and the September chills. So before we know what happened we're calling it Fall – just because the chill in the air recalls that is the way Fall should feel. And it is a reminder that the nesting season has ended, our nestboxes are filled with old nests and our heads spin with the argument of whether cleaning now is in order, or should we wait until Spring approaches again?

Confronting us immediately is the need to complete the counts of nests, eggs and fledges, and send the written reports off to be recorded and published. (See report form on next page.)

Let's be grateful for the youngsters that have gotten a start in life in our nestboxes this year. More than a few monitors are wondering what effect the grading and habitat destruction "just across the road from my trail" will have on my trail next year? Most of us view dimly the arrival of graders and bull-dozers that run willynilly over the green acres within our view. We think of the trees about to be destroyed and their ability to house so many of our cavity nesting friends. Where will those nests be built next year?

And let us not forget – those same trees also support vines, berries and insects that presently supply food for our favored feathered neighbors. Not only the trees but the nutrition they supply will likewise disappear. Such are some of the values we attribute to natural habitat.



our hanging boxes, well ventilated in the shade.

Next year's meeting will be held in April at the Airport Hilton Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. It should be a fun time. Keep it in mind.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

Founded in 1994, supported by Mt. Diablo Audubon Society and affiliated with the North American Bluebird Society, CBRP is "for the encouragement and conservation of cavitynesters—especially bluebirds—anywhere in the West."

CBRP is non-profit, has no paid staff, and is supported entirely by the efforts of volunteers and donations accepted by the Mt.Diablo Audubon Society on CBRP's behalf.

CBRP members fledged nearly 14,000 cavity nesters in 2004, of which nearly 7,300 were western and mountain bluebirds.

CBRP welcomes membership from the public who wish to support its program, and especially seeks those who will place appropriate nestboxes in the proper habitat, faithfully monitor the birds' progress through the nesting season, and report yearly on the results.

CBRP can furnish nestbox plans, a monitoring guide, forms for monitoring and reports, technical advice through a network of county coordinators, and sometimes the nestboxes themselves.

Membership, which includes this sometimes quarterly newsletter, is available for a donation of \$5 or more made payable to "MDAS-Bluebirds" and mailed to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Drive #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595. Donations are tax deductible.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

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BLUEBIRDS FLY!
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California Bluebird Recovery Program

ANNUAL REPORT INSTRUCTIONS

Dear Bluebirder:

Please submit your annual report as soon as you can after the close of the nesting season. The information needed is easily obtainable by tabulating your monitoring records from Form 1 — Individual Nestbox Record. If you have more than one distinct trail, please use a separate form for each. If you find this form confusing, do the best you can or call your County Coordinator for help. **At the least, fill in the unshaded portions.**

Top of form: Enter your name and the year. If your address is a PO Box or is different from the location of your boxes, please indicate the physical location of your trail as well. Crossroads or landmarks are okay. Tell us about your boxes: **1-Standard** is a NABS Standard or Gilbertson PVC box with a 1½" or 19/16" round hole, a Peterson box, or a Kentucky Slotbox with a 13/8" slot. **2-Larger than Std** is a box with a larger hole and, usually, a larger floor than the standard box. Flicker boxes typically have a 2" hole, kestrel boxes have a 3" hole, and Common Barn Owls need a 6" hole. **3-Smaller than Std** is a box with a hole smaller than 13/8" and usually has smaller floor and side dimensions. Chickadee boxes are typically 1½" and wrens are even smaller. Indicate the number of pairs: 2 boxes that are within 15 feet of each other.

First Column: Use a major 6-line block for each **Species**. There is room to record 8 species. If you had more than 8 species, please attach another form for the additional species. Show the **Box Type** (1, 2, or 3--see above) used for each species. If you were able to call a bander and you had any **Banding**, indicate the number banded by adults and chicks in this column. (If you had 4 boxes with bluebirds, all 4 would be recorded in this one 6-line block of rows.)

Second Column: This indicates the essential information that will help us analyze effort, fertility, survival, and breeding success; e.g., the # chicks hatched compared to the # chicks fledged gives some indication of weather, predation, and perhaps, nestbox placement and safety.

Third, Fourth, & Fifth Columns: Enter information for each brood. Many times you will not have second or third broods; in fact, third broods are quite rare unless they are replacements for earlier broods which were aborted.

Sixth Column: Totals, of course, are most important. Your grand total of all species will be calculated when reports are compiled.

when reports are complied.
This Page: Please give us any observations that you would like to share with other CBRPers in BLUE-BIRDS FLY! Attach extra sheets if you need more room.
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Return to: your County Coordinator or mail to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Don Yoder's

NOTES FROM THE FIELD...

Reports from monitors this year are copiously supplied with tales of birds lost due to weather conditions. Spring rains and winds took their tolls of hatchlings whose numbers we would like to see on the season's bottom lines.

Other extremes then took a second swing and overheated some youngsters who couldn't cope with Mother Nature's harsh treatment.

Of course there are exceptions to such generalizations, such as **Bill and Doris Allison**, **Amador**, who fledged 204 blues that started early, did well in the spring rains and similarly in the July heat. But tree swallows found the rainy weather unfavorable, started late, and even abandoned some nests in the wet weather, so fared more poorly than in previous years.



Ever busy and always productive, Jan Wasserman, Ventura, and her assistants fledged 1250 TRES. That's a lot of black beady eyes staring back from among the white feathers.

Kappy Hurst, Orange, found two male blues who may have overextended themselves before the season even started; they were dead in separate boxes.

And housing competition does occur in the bird world: she states "I opened one of my best BB boxes to find one ATFL sitting on hers and bluebird eggs, with the latter mom sitting nearby. I booted the ATFL and her eggs out. The BBs came back, hatched and fledged their young."

Also in Orange, Tom Croom has some nestboxes paired – of eight pairs, three had WEBL and TRES occupying neighboring boxes. The latter are taking over more than one half of the boxes previously used by the blues. Tom was told by third parties that a geocache had been placed in a nearby box and he subsequently saw individuals with a metal detector apparently looking for the device in its box. Someone went to a lot of work to make off with one of his boxes from a high tree.

Observation, but not in a nestbox – Merle and Patricia Ruggles, Placer, enjoyed watching an odd couple: a female white goose and a male Canada goose, always together. (It's so nice to have a steady companion. PD.)

Joan Jernegan, Placer, experienced her first year of having boxes disturbed by predators. The masked bandits paid several visits with the usual results for the occupants. She found a lonely OATI egg in a box with no nest and moved it to an active nest. The owners there apparently felt offended and did not return to complete their venture in the host nest but a new nest appeared immediately next door. It was also Joan's first year of having hatchlings banded.

Barbara Sibio, Sonoma, shared the cold, wet spring followed by July's high temperatures but it was the first year she did not have a third nesting. The unfavorable spring may have been the cause of the change in nest production.

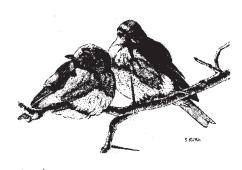
A fierce contest between TRESs and WEBLs won the space for the former, who 'outflew' the intended users (the Blues), and even blocked the hole of the box, so **Richard Brewster**, **Orange**, evicted the swallows but erected an additional box nearby. The swallows promptly rebuilt, and the WEBLs showed their gratitude by finally building a nest of their own and fledging without disturbance.

Unexplained findings of two dead birds are reported by Lena Yee Hayashi, Orange. One, a female banded 4/04, and the other, a male banded 5/05, each in the same respective boxes. She described finding them, "....the nests looked just like those when fledglings are gone and ready to clean out. As I pulled the nest out, the dead birds were found wedged under their respective boxes. Their heads and upper bodies were less feathered than their lower bodies. They must have wedged themselves tail and feet-first down the sides and under the nest. Disappointing, but interesting."

Joe Chandler, Orange, didn't have a record-setting year but his total results were better than the production of '04. The year started at a very promising high rate, but then settled back to a so-so pace overall. He intends to move a few nestboxes to new locations that may prove beneficial in '06. (If a box doesn't produce for two years, it's probably time to try another location or orientation. PD).

Peter Wetzel, Orange, found that his birds. perhaps being inexperienced or bashful, began nesting later than on other trails in the county. His absence for three weeks can hardly be responsible for late starts or lower success rates. but being conscientious, he can't overlook that possibility. Prior losses of TRES due to ants or mites were avoided this year- a 12" band of Raid near the base of a tree (that does not touch the foliage of another tree) is effective in stopping those pests without endangering birds. If HOWRs occupy a box, he considers that box 'deceased' until he can move it next year.

(cont. next page)



NOTES FROM THE FIELD - continued

Various measures are sometimes taken by monitors to defeat potential intrusions by intruders and predators. Joe Lapoint, Orange, thwarted occupancy of a nestbox by a HOSP by attaching a small piece of particle board to a box roof overhang. The HOSP was denied entrance due to his inability to cling to a vertical surface. It was effective here but does not prevent a HOSP from sitting for hours at a time on the roof of a bluebird box to keep the intended builder from gaining access to the box. Joe took the box away for a time, but upon returning the box, so also again came the sparrow.

Perplexing results, compared with those of earlier years, have put Bob Franz, Orange, into a quandry. Reduction in the number of nestboxes is partially responsible, but other factors must also be having an effect. His carefully kept figures reveal lower ratios for number of eggs, hatches, and fledges when based upon the number of boxes in use. While the numbers of birds fledged in the last 9 years is sizeable, he doesn't see the number of birds scouting for nestable cavities that he would expect in his neighborhood. He wonders whether absence of many birds might be due to predators, or West Nile Virus, higher than normal spring rainfall...? Based upon the numbers of birds fledged, Bob feels he should be seeing a blue haze of resident bluebirds searching for nesting spots.

(Comment: We believe there must be some studies concerning the carrying capacity of a given area for a particular species. When that number is reached, the surplus numbers have to move on to another area, leaving the local food supply for the local individuals, and brightening the backyard elsewhere of a fortunate new nestbox monitor. P.D.)

In one of the most detailed and carefully composed analysis of his Annual Report we have ever received, Mike Taylor, Orange, has summarized the year's results in his Breeding Biology of Western Bluebirds at the Tustin Ranch Golf Course. The document not only details various ratios of production for this year but establishes bases for comparisons with future years in studies of population trends on this and other trails. Mike intends to continue such studies on his own trail and to provide leadership for college students in similar studies on additional trails. Adding banding programs will then enable discovery of whether there is movement between populations or if birds return to the same sites from year to year. Mike credits assistance by Dick Purvis for the goals and planning of the program for this trail.





Busy WEBL residence in the Woodside Town Hall parking lot

Cats Indoors

(where they belong)

Please help!

American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors! Campaign is in its ninth year, and we need your help. We have a core of very faithful foundations and individuals who have generously contributed to the Campaign over the years, and without their support, the Campaign could not continue.

However, we would like to make the Campaign even more effective and successful than it already is, especially at the state and local level where our activists are really making a difference.

Therefore, we request your help in identifying additional sources of funding. Please let us know if you have any potential foundations or individuals who would be interested in supporting the Campaign.

Over the next year, our goals include:

- conducting an analysis and publishing a report on cat predation impacts on rare and declining species in five key states where cat interactions with vulnerable birds and other wildlife are especially problematic;
- continuing to engage state wildlife agencies, veterinarians, Audubon chapters, and local advocacy groups in Cats Indoors! nationwide; and
- increasing the involvement of Bird Conservation Alliance members in the Campaign.

Of course, individual contributions are always appreciated in any amount. If you would like to contribute to the Campaign, please write out a check to American Bird Conservancy & mail to:

Attn: Cats Indoors! American Bird Conservancy 1731 Connecticut Ave., NW 3rd Floor Washington, DC 20009

Howard Rathlesberger Reports

San Mateo County Coordinator

Unusual events seem to be occurring without end this summer season. The latest is a WEBL nest box with five eggs at the Woodside Library after seven years of expectation. This is at the rear of the Library property, in the native plant garden. The box, as well as others in Woodside, is monitored by Ruth Cronkite and her son Bryce.

I reported earlier that **Jean and I** are hosting a pair of Violet Green Swallows in a hanging box, 20' from the ground level, suspended from the rear roof over a small balcony off our bedroom – quite safe from raccoons (we hope). Two of the four chicks have fledged, but there are two yet to do so. There are more adult swallows flying around than simply the parents. We wonder if they are trying to entice those two to come out.

Our Violet Green Swallows laid the first of four eggs on May 25. Then, on June 10, we found the first chick, right on schedule of 15 days. We were concerned because the hen didn't seem to be brooding more regularly, but it must be that the secret to eggs keeping warm are the many feathers in the nest. Super insulation. This box, being 5x5 inside dimensions, has one of the clear plastic nest inserts I've cut from the bottom of an empty square mineral water bottle. Easy to pick up to check the nest for eggs or chicks.

We also are blessed with a Dark Eyed Junco nesting with three eggs in one of our potted plants on the front patio. Difficult to water the plant – mother bird flies out and keeps scolding while we try to water nearby.

This is truly an exciting season. The news of a WEBL in the former Presidio property in San Francisco is terrific, the first in approximately 70 years! WEBL's are making all sorts of firsts.

Habitat must be improving and, hopefully, the S.F. Audubon Society will begin to place some WEBL boxes around suitable areas. Seems they are not bothered by people, cars and sports activities, etc. as noted by the successful WEBL fledging of five chicks earlier this month in the Woodside Town Hall parking lot area. Other successful areas are Encinal Elementary School campus, Holy Cross Cemetery (Menlo Park), Burgess Park, Menlo Park and Sharon Heights golf courses. Menlo-Atherton High has at least three nesting pairs. As long as there's a tree limb we can hang a box on, we are almost guaranteed feathered residents.

Martha Macho identified a Tree Swallow in a box at Filoli's North Gate. So keep your eyes open for VGSW vs. TRES.

The Ash Throated Flycatchers are nesting. Cindy Lockhart has one on the lower Windy Hill trail in Portola Valley. She also reported having the pleasure of watching a Wild Turkey with five-six poults (chicks) walk by.

The Williams have a family with four chicks. We banded them earlier and now they come for a tasty meal of mealworms daily. Dawn Williams spied a Nuttall's Woodpecker feeding a Downey Woodpecker chick. She's checking carefully and getting photographic proof!

A Filoli WEBL hen, at least sevenyears-old and banded in 2000, is an active nester close to home - Filoli.

I hope Orange County's **Dick Purvis**' hanging box invention will catch on with more vigor. We certainly have been convinced of its value, and hope it will be accepted as the way to get the Blues back in urban America. The usefulness of Dick's 'pole' to access hang-

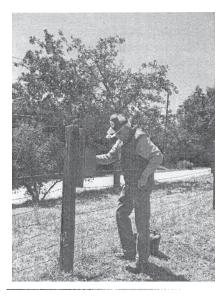
ing boxes was underscored by a recent article. The latest NABS Bluebird issue describes a study by a researcher who suggests predators remember easy picking cavities, so we think we have an advantage with the hanging box due to its portability. We can always move to another area.

The Woodside Town Center parking lot has a box which fledged on May 15 with five chicks, banded 5-7-05.

Recently, on Max Grandfield's Filoli trail #1 a WEBL hen was recovered that was originally banded by Lee Franks in 2000. At that time it was at least in its second year. That makes the bird seven years old. It was originally banded on trail 3, box 11 which hangs in the large Atlas Blue Cedar at Meadow Road.

Liz and Gary Nielsen, in Portola Valley reported on May 31st that they had their very first fledging of five WEBL's and are thrilled. They also had an Ash Throated Flycatcher that had problems with chicks dying, similar to what Max Grandfield experienced at Filoli.

I trust everyone has enjoyed the adventures of this year's nesting season, something new and different each great day! All the best to each of you.



Howard Rathlesberger checks WEBL trail on Whiskey Hill Road in Woodside.

California Bluebird Recovery Program



- 2. The Trail Monitors download and print individual box/trail forms to use during the nesting season.
- 3. At the end of the season (or as each brood fledges) the Trail Monitors fill in the Data Collection Spreadsheet and email the information to their County Coordinator or, Trail Monitors can continue to use pencil and paper, mail in their reports, and let their Coordinator handle the data entry.
- 4. The County Coordinator incorporates trail data from the Monitors' spreadsheets into the Analysis and Reporting Spreadsheet. These are emailed to the State Program Director.
- 5. The State Program Director incorporates the Counties' data into the State Reporting Spreadsheet without the need to enter the data manually from printed reports.

In order for this approach to work, the Trail Monitors must use the Data Collection Spreadsheet, and the County Coordinators must use the Analysis & Reporting Spreadsheet. It would be best if each County Coordinator set up a County-CBRP web page for his/her county. Many Internet Service Providers support personal web pages. Or, as in Santa Clara Valley, the local Audubon Chapter may be willing to host the County-CBRP web page.

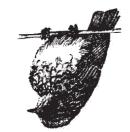
Programming techniques used in the various spreadsheets and web pages are standard and should work with all. spreadsheet programs and Internet browsers.

The SCVAS-CBRP web page and contents are easily transferable to other counties and I am willing to provide assistance in setting these up on your county's web page. The SCVAS-CBRP web page can be found on: http://www.scvas.org.

This fall was the first full-blown test of our new system. Over 80% of the trail monitors used the Data Collection Spreadsheet and emailed the results; the other 20% mailed their data on paper forms. State forms and the Santa Clara County form were generated automatically. The data was sent to the state as a spreadsheet in the same form as the State Annual Report spreadsheet eliminating the need to enter data manually. All but one monitor reported their end of season data – a new record!

An improved version of this system will be in place for next season. Trail monitors will use their web browsers to enter end-of-season data directly into a web form – no need to download forms or spreadsheets nor to email results.

Author Dick Blaine has been good enough to share this information through our newsletter. He offers to answer any questions or requests for copies of the web page and content at cbrp@scvas.org.



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California Bluebird Recovery Program's

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Please send correspondence to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595

A service of Mt. Diablo Audubon Society PO Box 53 Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0053

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