

BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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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

Simplifying Year-End Reporting

Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS)
California Bluebird Recovery Program (CBRP)

Database Approach to End of Season Reporting

By Dick Blaine

The very success of the California Bluebird Recovery Program has made it all but impossible to continue entering data received from trail monitors manually and process the data for some 150 trails and 15 species of cavity nesting birds in some 25 counties. Several years ago Santa Clara County CBRP in conjunction with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society started working on a computerized approach to reduce the amount of time that the county coordinator need to devote to this paperwork and to improve the timeliness of reporting.. This approach is the long term solution to end-of-season data reporting for the California Bluebird Recovery Program.

In Bluebirds Fly, V. 11 no. 2, Fall 2005 I described the approach that we took toward automating the end-of-season reporting chore. This worked well and was used by 80% of the counties' trail monitors to enter data in 2005.

However some manual intervention was required to generate CBRP annual reports for the trails and to build the spreadsheet used to consolidate this data into the format used for the state annual report; see the 2005 Annual Report in Bluebirds Fly, v. 12. no 1 Spring 2006. Nevertheless this approach was a great improvement over manual data entry and analysis as was done in previous years.

This year over 90% of Santa Clara County trail monitors entered their end of season data directly into an on-line database using their web browser. This saved the trail monitors the time needed to analyze and produce the annual report for their trails; it is less time consuming to enter the data at the nest box level into the database than to prepare the annual report for the trail. A new analysis and reporting program acquires (downloads) data from the on-line data base and prepares annual reports for

(cont. page 5)

2006 Annual Report

Orange County leads in fledglings & nestboxes.

With 1284 nestboxes and 6047 fledglings, Orange County once more is the top cavity nesting county and surely produces the most Western Bluebirds in the State. This remarkable feat is primarily because of the nearly vandal-free hanging boxes placed in parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and urban gardens. Very few of their locations could be considered native habitat but, rather, man-made habitat that would never see a bluebird except for the artificial cavities provided by dedicated bluebirders.

Top ten counties in fledglings were:

Orange - 6047; Merced - 3761
Santa Clara - 1942; Alameda - 942
Los Angeles - 826; Ventura - 629
Yolo/Solano - 628; San Mateo- 546
Contra Costa - 395; Amador - 213

Counties with the most boxes were:

Orange - 1284; Santa Clara - 648
Merced - 474; San Mateo - 265
Alameda - 243; Yolo/ Solano - 173
Ventura - 162; Los Angeles - 158
and Contra Costa - 132

Congratulations to all the birders who made this possible!

Origins of the Hanging Box

by Dick Purvis

The system of using an extension pole to hang boxes in trees was originally devised by Roger D. Thompson of Medford, Oregon. Roger developed this system in 1991 when insurance requirements prevented him from using ladders in one of the state parks. This innovative tool allowed him to raise and lower a nestbox to unusual heights, keeping the nestbox level during its movement, and avoiding practically all disturbance of the entire nest and contents. Due to the success he achieved, he wrote an article describing this method that appeared in the 1992 spring edition of *Sialia*, and in 1994 he gave a presentation on the method at the NABS meeting in Boise.

This *better mousetrap* caught my eye when I attended the 1994 meeting, and I was impressed by Roger's presentation. As an active Orange County birder, I soon replaced all of my boxes with hanging ones. The method worked beautifully here in this heavily urbanized environment.

I have since actively promoted the use of this technique and essentially all of the boxes in Southern California now are hanging boxes. I have written Roger acknowledging his development of the technique and thanking him for introducing me to this way of putting up boxes.

My own involvement has largely been in using and promoting the
(next col.)

Steve Simmons is top producer for 2006.

Others make impressive showing

With 3761 fledglings reported, Merced bird bander and barn owl promoter **Steve Simmons** surpassed our perennial producer **Dick Purvis** who always leads the pack with Western Bluebirds. Dick reported 1962 fledglings of which 1887 were WEBLs in 3 southern counties.

They were followed by the Tree Swallow lady **Jan Wasserman** who accounted for 667 new swallows in Ventura County.

Alameda County trail monitor **Irv Tiessen** reported on 12 species for a total of 906 fledglings of which 357 were WEBLs and 276 were TRES.

Another Orange County producer like Purvis was **Bob Franz** who accounted for 1023 fledglings, 943 of which were WEBLs.

Dr. Melanie Truan, at UC Davis, reported 628 fledglings of which 99 were WEBLs and 295 were TRES.



(Origins (cont.))

method locally in California, and at several annual conventions. I did modify the lifter so that it pivoted making it much easier and safer to monitor active nests. I wrote an article which was published in the Autumn 1997 of *Sialia* which described this modified lifter.

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 cavity-nesters—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 over 16,000 cavity nesters in 2006, of which nearly 8,200 were western 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, 22284 N. De Anza Circle, Cupertino, CA 95014. Donations are tax deductible.

California Bluebird Recovery Program

<http://cbrp.theblaines.net>

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BLUEBIRDS FLY!
Patsy Kahl, Current Editor

Don Yoder's

NOTES FROM THE FIELD...

At the start of the season **Sarah McTighe**, Nevada, moved an unproductive nestbox to a new location among some oak trees. Before any bluebirds accepted it there, house wrens started to build. 20 days passed and violet green swallows declared their ownership, built a nest and laid five eggs on top of the wren nest. It appeared to be an unusual command of new territory by second tenants in the season.



A nestbox on a trail cared for by **Sully Reallon**, Orange, had a rapid change of tenants: starting with a nest containing four bluebird eggs they held their ground for two weeks, but nest and eggs had disappeared when a Nuttall's woodpecker flew away from five new eggs on a layer of chips and shavings. Again, in two weeks that nest and the five eggs were gone--replaced by a bluebird nest with five eggs and those owners were flying triumphantly overhead. (If every species had a box of their own, a lot of building might be avoided. PD.)



Randy Johnson, Orange, has two boxes that each produced broods in February '04 and '05, and two broods each thereafter in those same years.
(That's good for the blue population.PD).



Upon cleaning nestboxes after fledging had occurred, **Earl Garrison**, Orange, suggests that bluebirds favor acacia seeds for food, he having found those seeds in nests after fledging. Perhaps they also promoted re-nesting, such having taken place within one week after the earlier fledging occurred.



Tom Croom, Orange, noted a slow spring start of nesting due to cold, rain and just plain nasty weather. But when the birds started building they exceeded each of nine previous years' production. Tom notes a 34% decline in tree swallow population due to bluebird resistance to encroachment by the swallows as tenants. Note the inquiry below by Amador County birders Bill & Doris Allison. If readers also noted such differences, please make notations in your reports. Tom used nine sets of paired boxes (close nesting by bluebirds and tree swallows). Only three sets had shared occupancies; the others but one variety per box pair.



For **Bill and Doris Allison**, Amador, late season heat killed numerous bluebird fledglings, caused nest abandonments, and kept eggs from hatching. They report that hatching of tree swallows in 2006 was down about 50% from 2005 and last year were down about the same from 2004. They speculate that heavy rains decreased food supplies at critical times, but wonder if other factors might be present? Please let us know if you have any such figures or observations.



Spokesmen **David DeMent and Roger Kneeland**, Los Angeles, encountered a variety of frustrating conditions affecting the final outcome for the year's fledging crop. Spring rains caused nesting starts to be about ten days later than usual; perhaps to stay dry, bees took over three boxes after the first bird crop had hatched. One brood and a parent were lost to some predator, but all boxes escaped involvement with house sparrows. All things considered, El Dorado Park enjoyed a banner year for bluebird production.



Carol Killebrew, San Diego, has adequate land to meet the needs of several pairs of bluebirds but her resident pair in an initial nestbox chose to rule the roost for two boxes and drove off two other pair that wanted to occupy the alternate box. To keep the peace, the second box was taken down. A band of repellent controlled pesky ants, but visits by jays, crows and a Cooper's Hawk all enjoyed only the water at the birdbath. The entire family of the initial pair of blues hatched and fledged a second family wearing the same colors.



"They" told **Betty Lovejoy**, Orange, not to expect any bluebird interest in her nestbox placed six feet from the ground on a birch tree. In spite of such a warning, on Easter Day there was a beautiful nest with one blue egg; on the following weekend there were five more eggs. With the help of meal worms all the young fledged on Memorial Day. (So there!)



During very rainy weather in April, **Holly Bourne**, Santa Clara, watched a nestbox slowly fill with nesting material to two-thirds of its capacity with no eggs appearing. Warmer weather brought along six eggs and revealed the owner to be a Bewick's wren. A three-week interval in monitoring permitted hatching and fledging on a date uncertain since the last check but an empty nest then attested to successful departures of all youngsters.



"In spite of heat, West Nile Virus... and imminent threat of bird flu, more Western Bluebirds fledged this year than last. Also, there was only one adult and one chick death"..... report from member **Richard C. Brewster**, Orange.



Howard Rathlesberger Reports

Howard recently retired as San Mateo County Coordinator and flew south with his wife. His last report from fall:

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. She also reported having the pleasure of watching a Wild Turkey with 5-6 poults (chicks) walk by.

The **Williams** have a family with 4 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, 7 years and banded in 2000, is an active nester close to home - Filoli. .

TA recent 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.

Well, enjoy the upcoming of the nesting season, something new and different each great day! All the best to you!

IN MEMORIAM - NORMAN WATENPAUGH

SCVAS members were deeply saddened to hear the news of Norman Watenpaugh's recent death in October. Many of you knew him as I did – dedicated and consummate volunteer, conservationist, field trip leader, educator, and bluebird trail monitor. *The Gilroy Dispatch* often quoted Norman and aptly nicknamed him the "Birdman of Gilroy."



I remember when Norman came to the SCV AS office many years ago, toting one of his well-designed barn owl boxes. He explained to us how he became interested in barn owls over 20 years ago after hearing how effective they are at keeping rodent populations in check. After some research, Norman thought he could build and erect houses to benefit both farmers and owls. That was Norman – when he saw a problem he set about solve it. Norman's barn owl boxes led him to become interested in bird boxes of all types. Participating in the California Bluebird Recovery Program, he erected, maintained and monitored an impressive 120 bluebird boxes in and around Gilroy for the past ten years.

Norman was also a conservationist with a passion for preserving agricultural land. As a long-time engineer and head of maintenance for Gentry Foods in Gilroy, Norman often spoke to local farmers and understood their issues. An active member of *Save Open*

Space Gilroy, he fought to preserve the rural farming heritage of the south county. Norman was also a member of our Environmental Action Committee. He was an educator and popular volunteer. He helped during special events such as Wildlife force in helping SCVAS grow Gilroy Earth Day

to reach more and more children each year. He was also a volunteer for other organizations, such as the FleEducation Day. He was a main urs Garden Club, where he kept the Gilroy Senior Center garden in bloom.

In honor of Norman, SCVAS has set up a Volunteer Memorial Fund to receive donations in memory of volunteers, who will be listed on a memorial page of our website. When making a memorial donation, please indicate the volunteer that you want to memorialize. The fund will finance a new or continuing program.

Also, Norman's Gilroy nest boxes will need to be monitored, so volunteering to help with the Cavity Nesters Recovery Program would be a very fitting tribute to this fine man. We will all sorely miss Norman's bright energy and presence at SCVAS. His spirit will continue on in our hearts for a very, very long time. We salute you, Birdman of Gilroy, you are a true and inspirational gentleman.

Debbie Thompson

Reprinted with permission from the AVOCET, Jan - Feb 2007, The newsletter of the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society,

Urban Adaptation of Western Bluebird in San Diego County

Over much of its range the Western Bluebird is in decline. Surprisingly, the Western Bluebirds of San Diego County appear to be bucking this general trend.

The Western Bluebird is a year round resident of San Diego County, and the Mountain Bluebird occasionally migrates here in winter. Western Bluebirds are common in the foothills and mountains of San Diego County, especially where meadows meet groves of oaks or pine trees.

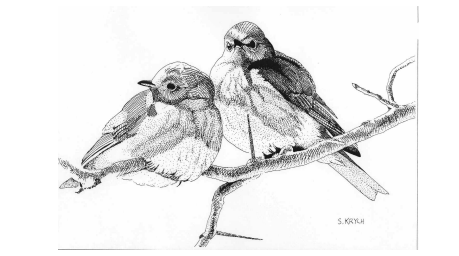
Phill Unitt, curator of birds and mammals at the San Diego Natural History Museum, recently published a nice book: the San Diego County Bird Atlas. In his book, Unitt states that summer and winter bird counts from 1997 to 2002 indicate the Western Bluebird is holding its own in San Diego County, and showing signs of spreading into urban areas with mature trees and wide lawns. He says in the late 1980's, Nuttall's Woodpecker started adapting in San Diego County, moving into the city wherever it was landscaped with wood-pecker friendly trees like liquid-amber, birch, alder, and eucalyptus. This cavity excavator helped pave the way for two secondary cavity nesters, the House Wren & Western Bluebird. Unitt also says that in the 1980's he told people inquiring about birdhouses to forget about putting

Database Approach to End of Season Reporting

(cont. from page 1)

each trail and county as well as for the entire state. Little or no manual intervention was needed to prepare these reports. Best of all the state-wide annual report is prepared in the same format as used in previous years so that there is little effort required to prepare the annual report.

The database and reporting programs were developed in such a way as to support the entire state thus eliminating the horrific bottleneck previously needed to produce the state-wide annual report. It is hoped that in 2007 all counties in the state will use this database for reporting their results.



Urban Adaptation (cont.)

them up in metropolitan San Diego; no native species along the coast would use them. He says enough people ignored his advice to make birdhouses an increasing factor in the spread of the House Wren and Western Bluebird. He sees a pattern emerging: many arboreal species that can live in a stratum above us people on the ground ultimately adapt to urbanization.

Carol Killebrew, CBRP San Diego County Coordinator
 "Bluebirds of San Diego County"
 website at:
<http://home.netcom.com/~bluebirds>

Technical Information:

The database was developed by a very talented (retired) database programmer, Cynthia Berg, using MySQL. It currently resides on a web page titled HostedBirds.

User instructions (help) can be viewed at <http://cbrp.theblaines.net>; however, a password is needed to access the database.

The following three functions are provided:

1. Enter names and information about trail monitors by county (administrator only)
2. Enter trail information by county (administrator only)
3. Enter/view end-of-season box by box data (all users)

The analysis and reporting program is an Excel spreadsheet which links to the database and issues queries to obtain needed data. That data is then displayed in several formats:

Annual report for each trail, each county, and statewide (one sheet summary for each)

Pivot table allowing review and analysis of the data by county, trail, species, etc.

Annual report spreadsheet for the entire state (see 2005 Annual Report in Bluebirds Fly, v. 12. no 1 Spring 2006)

These reports can be printed and/or emailed directly from the Excel Spreadsheet as a normal print files or pdfs.

CBRP County Coordinators 01-28-2007

(Please let me know your email address if it is not listed)

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Mark Your Calendars.

2007 Convention

North American Bluebird Society
 "Bluebird Partnerships"
 University of Georgia at Athens
 September 20-23, 2007

Preliminary Report by
 Convention Chair Helen S. Munro

The 2007 NABS convention will serve to bring monitors and researchers together to share what we have all learned about these remarkable birds. The convention will be held on the historic campus of the University of Georgia in Athens, GA. Sleeping rooms will be available at the University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education Conference Center & Hotel, a beautiful facility dedicated to continuing education. Rooms for meetings, vendors, exhibits and the silent auction will be conveniently located in the same building.

The speakers are currently being selected from an array of researchers of bluebirds as well as related topics.

Dates for the convention are Thursday, September 20 through Sunday morning, September 23. A pre-conference trip on Wednesday, September 19 will take participants about an hour away to Atlanta's new breathtaking aquarium and the Cyclorama a 360-degree painting of the Battle of Atlanta.

Thursday will include the NABS board meeting, four afternoon speakers, the affiliates meeting and the evening reunion dinner.

Friday's session will include the BB-L breakfast, a field trip to the Georgia University Arboretum in

NOTES ON 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

This year's annual report is on two sheets. Each monitor's report, organized by County, is on one line. The line runs across the sheet and continues on the back of the sheet. The line number is the identifier so that the name appears on the front but only the number is on the back. County totals are in the last columns on the back of the two sheets. We have abbreviated the bird species by their Alpha Code.

Alpha codes were designed by the Bird Banding Laboratory of the US Geological Survey at Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland. They generally signify the first two letters of the English names of the birds; e.g. Western Bluebird is WEBL, Acorn Woodpecker is ACWO. However, when the first given name is two words or hyphenated, the first letter of the first names are used as in Chestnut-backed Chickadee – CBCH.

There are exceptions to this rule when two birds would end up with the same code. An example is the Tree Swallow and the Trumpeter Swan, both of which would normally be TRSW. In this case, the Tree Swallow was given TRES and the swan, TRUS. Other than the Tree Swallow, all the rest of our cavity-nesters follow the conventional methods of naming except the Barn Owl which is BNOW.

All birds on the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) have a unique four-letter Alpha Code which is easier to remember than the AOU numbers (and less confusing than bb for bluebird or chc for chickadee which could be any of three species). We urge all birders to use the professionals' alpha codes when reporting.

Here, for your convenience, are the codes we have used on this and past reports.

- ACWO :: Acorn Woodpecker
- AMKE :: American Kestrel
- ATFL :: Ash-throated Flycatcher
- BEWR :: Bewick' Wren
- BLPH :: Black Phoebe
- BNOW :: Barn Owl
- CBCH::Chestnut-backed Chickadee
- EUST :: European Starling
- HOFI :: House Finch
- HOSP :: House Sparrow
- HOWR :: House Wren
- MOBL :: Mountain Bluebird
- MOCH :: Mountain Chickadee
- NUWO :: Nuttall's Woodpecker
- OATI :: Oak Titmouse
- PYNU :: Pygmy Nuthatch
- RBNU :: Red-breasted Nuthatch
- TRES :: Tree Swallow
- VGSW :: Violet-green Swallow
- WBNU :: White-breasted Nuthatch
- WEBL :: Western Bluebird
- WESO :: Western Screech Owl
- WODU :: Wood Duck

the Conservatory. Saturday's schedule will consist of several science-focused presentations.

A post-conference trip on Sunday September 23 is planned to Stone Mountain to see the magnificent monolith and the carvings depicting General Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders.

This will be NABS' first self-sponsored convention and if any affiliates, NABS members, vendors or other organizations are able and willing to help with any aspect of the convention, monetarily or through volunteering, please contact Convention Chairwoman Helen Munro. Thank you!

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Changes in the California Bluebird Recovery Program

Dick Blaine, CBRP Program Director

Hello CBRP birders. As the new Program director I would like to report the changes that have occurred this Fall/Winter. See our new web site, <http://cbrp.theblaines.net> and the Winter 2006-2007 Bluebirds Fly issue for more information.

Retirements:

- *Don Yoder, founder and program director for 14 years. Don did a great job in organizing and operating CBRP and will be a hard act to follow.
- *Hatch Graham, who is well known for his monitoring guide, prepared the annual reports over the past years and maintained the membership list.
- *Patsy Kahl, *Bluebirds Fly* editor, will retire after preparing the Winter 2006-2007 issue.
- *Howard Rathlesberger, long-time San Mateo County Coordinator, has moved to Southern California.
- *Warren Engstrom, long-time Contra Costa County Coordinator

New Board of Directors

- *Program Director - Dick Blaine (Santa Clara County) - dick@theblaines.net
- *Assistant Program Director - Georgette Howington (Contra Costa County) - georgette@birdscape.net
- *Bluebirds Fly Editor - Mike Spohn (San Diego County) - mospohn@socalbluebirds.org
- *Recruiting - Dick Purvis (Orange County) - dickersly@aol.com

* Member-at-Large - Dave Cook (Santa Clara County) - justdave50@earthlink.net.

2006 Annual Report

- *Should be completed by the end of January
- *Will be posted on the CBRP web page and distributed with the next newsletter.

Newsletter

- *The Winter 2006-2007 issue of Bluebirds fly is scheduled for mailing in February.

CBRP Web Site

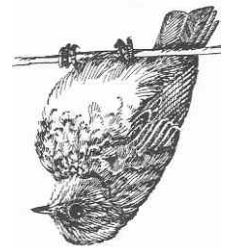
- *See <http://cbrp.theblaines.net>.
- *Contains reporting forms, contact information, results, references, previous annual report/newsletters and information on end-of-year reporting.

2007 Goals

- *Recruit additional County Coordinators
- *End-of-season reporting to use on-line data entry rather than paper
- *Build a strong relationship between the Audubon & CBRP
- *Provide CBRP data to TBN (Cornell University) for scientific study.

2007 Season

- *Time for trail monitors to start getting nest boxes ready for the 2007 season.



California Bluebird Recovery Program's
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Please send correspondence to CBRP
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