



# BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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## California Bluebird Recovery Program Newsletter

—Assisted by Mount 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”

### 2007 California Nestbox Reporting Results

This issue contains the nestbox results for the 2007 nesting season. Covering 22 counties, 128 dedicated trail-monitors took the time to send their statistics to us.

In summary, 2007 was a below average year. The number of monitors reporting was the lowest in twelve years.

The percentage of nesting tries to the number of boxes (69%) was the lowest since 1997.

Comments from the field confirm the bluebirds got a late start in 2007 due to a cold spring. This reduced the number of second nestings.

There is certainly good news in the numbers. The number of chicks fledged compared to the number of eggs (68%) was very consistent with previous years.

Due to the consistent care

trail monitors provide, a chick that makes it out of the egg had an 89% chance of fledging. This is an impressive number.

Orange County again showed incredible numbers. Fledging 5,212 WEBL, the OC produced almost two times the number of WEBL than the other twenty one counties combined. Wow!

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### Orange County Leads in Fledglings and Nestboxes

With 1,293 nestboxes and 5,612 (5,212 WEBL) fledglings, Orange County once again is the top cavity nesting county and produced 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.



County	#Trails	#Boxes	Total Fledged	WEBL Fledged
Orange	47	1293	5612	5212
Merced	2	688	3436	38
Santa Clara	52	703	1582	491
Los Angeles	5	144	808	795
San Mateo	20	274	631	247
Contra Costa	11	165	368	203
Santa Barbara	6	96	335	245
Yolo	1	92	321	84
Amador	3	59	259	196
Solano	1	79	223	12
El Dorado	2	58	171	115
Riverside	3	36	151	132
Alameda	2	243	87	44
Nevada	3	37	65	49
San Diego	6	10	40	26
San Bernardino	1	7	37	37
Placer	2	27	36	26
Kern	1	2	10	10
Butte	1	2	7	7
Mendocino	1	2	4	
Yuba	1	10	3	3
Ventura	1	5	2	1

#### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- 2007 Annual Report
- OC Leads Again
- Manny Ackerman
- Steve Simmons
- Nest Box Danger
- Warren Engstrom



## The Director's Chair

Another nesting season has passed. CBRP trail monitors fledged over 14,000 new creatures, many of which would not have survived except for the shelters and care you provided them. For such a low cost environmental program, we did really well! Thanks to all of you who participate each year.

This issue contains the 2007 annual report and several articles summarizing the results. The on-line database was used for more than 150 of the 172 trail reports which were submitted. I can't begin to tell you how much effort that saved.

The annual report is now fully automated and many reports are available from the on-line "reports" facility. You can track activity by trail, species by county, raw data, summaries by trail, county and state. We are making changes to make data entry easier. Many of you have made suggestions and I hope to implement these.

If you haven't tried it, link to the on-line data base and login using your userid and password; (alternately, logon as "Guest") and select the "Reports" screen. Many thanks to all of you for participating.

By the time you receive this issue, the nesting season will have already started in Santa Clara county. Local trail monitors are checking their nest boxes in preparation of the 2008 nesting season. I encourage you to do the same.

Although there is some disagreement, in this county we discard old nests at the end of each season, clean the interior of the nest boxes, and make sure that the boxes are in good repair. As a rule-of-thumb, if a box has not produced in the past three years, we relocate it.

Forms are available on our web site, <http://cbrp.org>, for recording your observations during the season. There are two sets of forms - 1) one page per visit with space for about 20 nest boxes and, 2) one page per nest box with space for about 20 visits. Some of us prefer one over the other. Also, these forms are available as spreadsheets which can be downloaded to your computer and filled in at home or in the field.

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## The Editor's Journal



The Spring issue of *Bluebirds Fly!* has traditionally been known as the 'Reporting' issue. This issue carries on that tradition. In these pages you will find extensive coverage about our 2007 conservation efforts.

This is the first year we have collected almost all of the results from the CBRP reporting web site instead of on paper. Although it took a little getting used to, most birders found the reporting site easy to use.

Special thanks to Dick Blaine and the those who volunteered their computer expertise to get this site online. I know Dick believes the automation of our reporting process is critical to our success going forward. I completely agree. The manual labor required to collect the data from paper was threatening our capability to track our efforts.

Steve Simmons of Merced County contributed an article about his experience with his raptor cavity nesters. As I proofed his work, I came across his casual comment stating he banded his 10,000th barn owl in 2006. I was stunned!

Can you imagine the amount of time and effort it would take to band 10,000 birds? This type of loyalty, dedication, and commitment to cavity nesters is what makes the CBRP so special. I might add, Steve was also the top producer in CA in 2007. Congratulations Steve, and thanks for a lifetime of dedication to our cause.

Speaking of dedication. I interviewed a very special man named Manny Ackerman in Orange County. Manny has built more than 1600 nestboxes in the last eight years and has provided them at no charge to hundreds of bluebirders. His story is intriguing.

The nesting season is upon us. Get your monitoring gear ready. Good luck to all and have a safe and productive 2008 season.

MGS

Michael G. Spohn

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## On The Trail With Manny Ackerman

By Michael G. Spohn

Manny Ackerman is an avid bluebirder and nestbox builder in Orange County. I stopped by his fabulous workshop in Laguna Woods Village (formerly Leisure World) to talk bluebirds.

Manny was born and raised in Cleveland Ohio. He tells me he wasn't too crazy about having a boss, so he started his own consulting business providing structural engineering and drafting services to steel building fabricators.

About 19 years ago in the middle of a winter storm, Manny and his wife Rose decided to retire someplace warm. They moved to Southern California.

At a local Audubon meeting eight years ago, Manny met Dick Purvis. Dick gave a presentation on his now famous hanging nestbox system.

Manny was 'hooked' so-to-speak. He was in the workshop the next day designing his own Purvis nestbox.

Since then, Manny has built 1,660

nestboxes. More than 1,100 of the boxes are hanging in trees around the 3.5 square mile grounds of Laguna Woods. There are many monitors who tend to the boxes.

The wood used to build the boxes is do-



*Manny with one of his nestboxes*

nated or is left over scraps from other projects. Manny then paints the boxes and places them on a shelf until they get distributed. Today, he builds four boxes a week.

Manny also leads a tree labeling project. Black plastic labels with white lettering are placed on trees throughout the village. The labels have the tree common name as well as its scientific name.

Manny says there are 4,500 trees with labels and he gets orders for more every week. Residents are charged \$5.00 per label. This is a very popular project among the residents.

At age 88, Manny shows no signs of slowing down. He told me he is too young to retire.

He volunteers as the woodshop foreman on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. The shop is huge and has every power woodworking tool you can dream of. When I was there, I saw a dozen or so village residents working on all kinds of projects.

Manny says he will continue to build nestboxes as long as there is a demand for them. I asked Manny to estimate how many bluebirds have fledged from his boxes. He shrugged and said, "I don't really know - thousands I guess."

## About the California Bluebird Recovery Program

### Our Mission

- ◆ Enlist current bluebirders and recruit others who will help reestablish bluebirds to their normal habitat
- ◆ Locate preferred habitat for the placement of nestboxes suitable for bluebirds
- ◆ Secure monitors to care for the boxes and keep systematic records of the development of young birds during the nesting season
- ◆ Record and analyze all annual summaries of nestbox records
- ◆ Provide a forum (newsletter) through which fellow trail monitors can exchange information and secure help in solving problems encountered in the field.

### Learn More

To learn more about the California Bluebird Recovery Program and other cavity nester conservation programs, visit the below web sites:

<http://www.cbrp.org>

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>

<http://www.socalbluebirds.org>

<http://www.sialis.org>

If you are looking for a mentor, start by contacting the county coordinator in your county listed on page 10. You can also contact Dick Blaine ([dick@theblaines.net](mailto:dick@theblaines.net)) or Mike Spohn ([mspohn@socalbluebirds.org](mailto:mspohn@socalbluebirds.org)).

Please consider supporting our efforts. There is a donation form on the back page of this newsletter. Your contribution is tax-deductible and goes a long way in helping us conserve the bluebird population in California.

## Effects of Too Much Rain & Drought on Cavity Nesting Raptors

By Steve Simmons

Three cavity nesting raptors nest in my Merced County nest boxes every year: barn owls, western screech owls and American kestrels.

All three have up and down years, but in 2006 all three had a very poor nesting year. In 2007, both species of owls again had very poor nesting seasons which was a carry-over from 2006.

For any raptor, when their food base is in short supply, many starve to death which is the #1 killer of raptors. This raises even more havoc for them during the nesting period.

The snowy owl is an example of a raptor that has good and bad reproductive years. Nest success depends on the lemming numbers each year in the far northern reaches of Canada and Alaska. This has been well documented through the years with studies of the snowy owls.

Here in the Central Valley, the raptors have a very diverse choice of mammals, arthropods and insects to dine on and with our mild winters, their food production is usually very stable during the nesting season. In 2006 we had unusually heavy rains starting the first of March through the first two weeks in April.

Most of the fields in the Central Valley were flooded with standing water which caused the majority of the mammal food base to be drowned. The few that were able to outrun the flood water were easily picked off by day or night by avian predators, cats, coyotes and raccoons.

When I made my third barn owl nest box check at the end of February, over 75% of the 300+ barn owl boxes I was checking had adult pairs, incubating females or females with very young owlets too small to band. When I went back three weeks later thinking that I would be

banding from 4 to 8 owlets per box, I was shocked to find myself banding only one, two or three owlets per box. In some boxes there were no owlets on many of the ranches I monitored.

To make things even worse, upon my next visit I found many of the owlets that I had banded were either dead or missing from the nest box.

Barn owl owlets are in the nest boxes up to eight weeks before they fledge. I then observed something that I had never seen before--adult barn owls eating their own young. I had a graduate student down from Washington State working on her Ph.D. on the barn owls and she also observed adults eating their offspring. We did not feel that they killed the owlets, but with food so scarce even for the adults, why waste the food which may mean the difference in their own survival?

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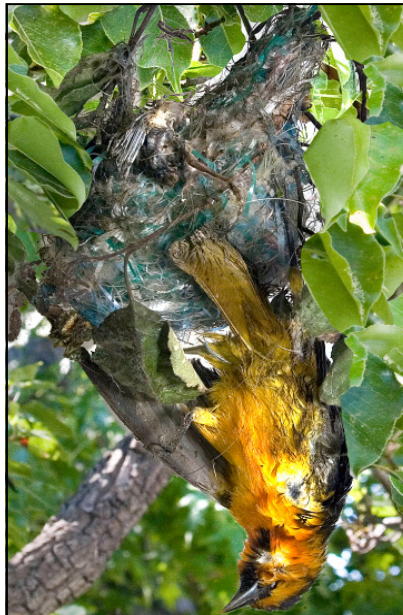
## The Threat of Foreign Nesting Material—A Real Danger at Easter

By Susan Bulger

While checking a nest box last season, I noticed one of the two bluebird chicks was smaller than the other, and the father was not around. Wanting them both to survive I decided to bring mealworms over the next ten days or so until they fledged.

A friend agreed to take turns delivering the mealies for the mother bird to feed the chicks. Fledge day came for one bird, but the second remained in the box for several more days. Sometimes we could hear cheeping in the box. Knowing one was smaller I expected it to stay inside longer.

When it appeared that the birds were gone, I checked the box and was saddened to find the chick dead. Its foot was tangled in a four inch piece of fishing line



Oriole & chick killed by man-made string

which was entwined with some grasses. I was amazed! There is no place to fish anywhere around!

Tragedies like this are seen by nest box monitors all too often. We see plastic Easter grass, kite string, gift wrap ribbon; pieces of frayed blue tarps, shredded baseballs, strings of all kinds. When building nests, birds are attracted to these strings. Man-made strings are too strong, and thus deadly, because they entangle the chicks' feet while they toddle around in the nest.

Nest box monitors should always remove the strings or cut them in small pieces with a tiny pair of scissors if they can't be removed without destroying the important

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# California Bluebird Recovery Program Twelve Year Results

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Counties	21	31	33	37	33	26	28	30	25	25	19	22
Reporters	169	293	326	264	178	175	193	163	176	148	152	128
Species	16	17	16	20	20	18	18	18	18	19	20	20
Boxes (N)	2,400	3,642	4,142	4,596	4,167	4,209	4,027	4,055	4,129	5,139	3,942	4,032
Tries (T)	1,526	2,442	3,214	3,527	3,783	4,023	3,937	3,514	4,026	4,177	4,142	2,789
T/N	64%	67%	78%	77%	91%	96%	98%	87%	98%	81%	105%	69%
Eggs (E)					20,315	23,470	23,981	17,816	19,109	22,879	24,093	20,729
E/N					5.5	5.6	5.9	4.4	4.6	4.5	6.1	5.1
E/T					6.1	5.8	6.1	5.1	4.7	4.5	5.8	7.4
Chicks (H)					17,204	18,501	19,250	14,429	15,500	17,888	18,707	15,889
H/N					4.1	4.4	4.8	3.6	3.8	3.5	4.7	3.9
H/T					4.5	4.6	4.9	4.1	3.8	4.3	4.5	5.7
H/E					75%	79%	80%	81%	81%	78%	78%	77%
Fledged (F)	5,077	8,393	11,326	13,122	15,703	17,399	16,201	12,720	13,700	18,414	17,330	14,188
F/N	2.1	2.3	2.7	2.9	3.8	4.1	4.0	3.1	3.3	3.6	4.4	3.5
F/T	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.7	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.6	3.4	4.4	4.2	5.1
F/E					68%	72%	68%	71%	72%	80%	72%	68%
F/H					91%	92%	84%	88%	88%	103%	93%	89%

E—No. of Eggs                      F—No. of Chicks Fledged  
H—No. of Chicks Hatched      N—No. of Boxes  
T—No. of Tries

\*No data on T, E, H from Ventura or Merced Counties in 2005  
6 counties which reported in 2005 did not report in 2006 and no data on T, E, H from Merced County in 2006  
2007 Note: 172 trails reported. Few major producers did not report.

## The Director's Chair

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The board is considering ways that CRBP can help the environment by finding additional trail monitors and providing nest box material and educational resources for in-class and field trips at the elementary school levels.

We will start by finding what resources are already in use in various school districts. At a minimum I would like to build a list of resource material which would be available to CBRP members as well as to all of the Audubon Chapters. Looking further down the road, we are discussing the possibility of developing our own resources and making these available. If you are involved or would like to be involved in these

efforts, please let me know. Also if you are in need of such material, let me know about that too.

I want to express my thanks to several people/organizations for helping make CBRP so successful. First, our board of directors for their support. Second, the *Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS)* which is one of our strongest supporters for allowing us to use their list server and supporting our program in the Santa Clara Valley. Third, Michael Spohn, Editor of our newsletter, for hosting our web site. Fourth to Cynthia Burg who developed and continues to support the on-line database. Without this sup-

port we would still be using pencils and paper. Fifth, thanks to those who donate funds to keep our program alive. Sixth to the *Mt. Diablo Audubon Society* for paying our bills, banking our donations, and providing tax-free status to our organization. Finally, to all of you who monitor nest boxes and report the results. Without you there would be no CBRP.

I have lots more to say but, I think, that our editor is running out of room as well as patience waiting for this article. Happy birding in 2008.

## Reader's Guide For 2007 Annual Report

This year's annual report spans eighteen pages. Each trail is listed on one line and grouped by County.

The line runs across the page and continues for a total of six pages. The line number on the left-hand side of each page is the trail identifier as the trail name appears only on the first page.

Trail and County totals are in the last columns on the sixth

page. The last (bottom) row (following Yuba County) has the totals, and percentages or averages for the state.

Small discrepancies may appear when comparing the fledgling/box counts in the articles which appear in this issue and the annual report because of a small time difference between the preparation of the two.

### COLUMN HEADINGS—ABREVIATIONS

#### **Trail Boxes:**

SB – standard boxes (Bluebirds)  
LB – large boxes (Barn Owl, etc.)  
SmB – small boxes (Chickadees, etc.)

Number of boxes reported is the total for the trail. Nest tries indicates the number of boxes nests were at least started.

#### **Counts:**

T – total (all broods)  
1 – 1<sup>st</sup> brood (clutch)  
2<sup>nd</sup> brood (clutch)  
3<sup>rd</sup> brood (clutch)

Note that brood information is listed only for WEBL(3) & TRES(2). Other species are not known to produce multiple broods (clutches.)

#### **Property:**

N – nest tries  
E – eggs  
H – hatchlings  
F – fledglings

#### **Examples:**

TF is the total number of fledglings for the trail;  
1H is the first brood hatchling count for the trail  
3F is the third brood fledgling count for the trail

### SUMMARY CALCULATIONS—ABREVIATIONS

#### **Boxes:**

Tr – trail  
Co – County  
% – percent of county boxes by trail

#### **Fledglings:**

Tr – trail  
Co – County  
% – percent of county boxes by trail

#### **Fledge/Box:**

Tr – trail; Co – County

**%Co/St: Boxes:** – percent of state boxes in County

**%Co/St: Fledges:** – percent of state fledges produced by trail.

## Danger at Easter

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nest cup. Sometimes it is better to fashion a new nest rather than leave one with man-made materials.

I monitor bluebird boxes at several parks. Two are urban regional parks with fishing lakes. Fishing line segments, sometimes with hooks attached, are left on the ground every day. On Easter, many people bring Easter baskets with plastic grass and it gets spread all over the lawns.

Birds just love to include these 'pretty/useful' materials in their nests. The bluebirds are the lucky ones

because I can examine their nests and correct the situation. But the open nesters build high in the trees where no one can reach them and no one is checking them.

A robin is tangled in a long piece of monofilament high in a silk oak tree. It is hanging upside down with wings outstretched. What a gruesome death. A crow is dead with wings outstretched tangled in fishing line high in a sycamore. I once saw something fall and an oriole flying down after it. Her nest fell out of the

tree since the monofilament fishing line would not properly attach to the tree. The photo shows the disaster caused by a nest made almost entirely of fishing line and Easter grass with some gift wrap ribbon as well. The male oriole's foot is wrapped in monofilament. A chick about two weeks old is tangled near the top of the nest. It is so very sad.

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## Bird Species Alpha Code Identifiers

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 the 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 of 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 3 species).

We urge all birders to use the professionals' alpha codes when reporting. To the right for your convenience, are the codes we have used on this and past reports.

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

## Monitoring Warren Engstrom's Trail In Contra Costa County

By Georgette A. Howington

The East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD) in Contra Costa County manages 25,000 acres of publicly owned, privately accessed watershed land. For eighteen years, Warren Engstrom, often accompanied by his beautiful wife Shirley, faithfully monitored over fifty nest boxes established on four EBMUD trails. Each trail setting is postcard perfect: reservoirs of water, rolling, pastoral grasslands, oak and mixed woodlands and expansive blue skies painted with seasonal clouds.

The Western bluebird flocks on grassy knolls are a testament to the thousands of fledglings the Engstrom's encouraged. In early 2006, when Warren handed me his security gate key, saying he

appreciated my taking his trails, I felt a deep heaviness well up in my heart.

"Some of the best moments of my life were on these trails", he told me. I noticed Warren's tall, lithe physique sauntered much slower these days as he continued, "I'd look around, especially when I was alone, and felt that all of this was mine."

After monitoring for only seven years, I completely understand. As monitors we not only become familiar with countless animals and insects on our trails but we experience the trees, the flowers, the weeds, the mud, a tough climb, the cracks, the heat, the cold, the wind...the rain... birth...death...sorrow...and great joy.

Sixteen-year old Eagle Scout candi-

date Ryan Kowalski, successfully built ten fir nest boxes and replaced several old ones. EBMUD's Wildlife Biologist, Roger Hartwell, generously arranged to have new cedar nest boxes built so I could replace all the remaining boxes.

My monitor partner Tom Garry and I dropped-off a few new nest boxes at Warren and Shirley's home a few evenings ago.

They walked us to the door as we departed and I heard Warren call out to us, "Goodbye, fellow blue-birders!" And as the resonance of his soft, gentle voice followed me into the dark night, a thought raced across my mind looking forward twenty years when I too will turnover my bluebird trails.

## Supplementing WEBL Diet with Mealworms

By Susan Bulger

Expert bluebirder Dick Purvis believes most bluebird chicks that fail to fledge die from starvation. If bluebirds are in two to five acres of good habitat of low clipped grass with scattered trees, they can find enough insects to feed their chicks.

During a cold spell or in marginal habitat, or in the case of a missing parent, there may not be enough food to feed a clutch of chicks. In these events, offering mealworms may save the chicks from starvation.

Mealworms are the larva of the darkling beetle. Their lifecycle has four stages; egg, larva (mealworm), pupa, and beetle.

Mealworms are available in pet stores and through *Rainbow Mealworms* in Compton, CA (800-777-9676). Medium size mealworms are used to feed bluebirds.

If you already have bluebirds in your yard and need to help them, place mealworms in a shallow dish with vertical sides of about ¾ inch in a shady spot where the birds usually perch. They will find them quickly.

Gradually move the dish to where you want to feed them but not too close to a nest box. Watch the dish and remove it when you can't monitor.

It is imperative to oversee the feeding of mealworms to prevent a very difficult problem from developing. If a robin, mockingbird, jay or crow learns of the free food, they will scare the bluebirds away with their persistent presence. This is the reason simply setting a dish of mealworms in your yard will not attract bluebirds. Other birds are likely to find it first.

After the bluebirds learn where the food is, it is helpful to have a feeder that excludes larger birds. The Droll Yankee and jail type feeder with slats or wire squares work well (see notes at end). A roof provides needed shade and protection from rain. Mealworms cannot survive heat, direct sunshine, or too much

moisture.

The number of mealworms to offer depends on the need. For a trail monitor, mealworms are helpful to quickly assess information about a nest site. If you regularly offer 8-12 mealworms when you check a box, the pair will likely rush to see you. This way you will know if both parents are alive.

Place the 'mealies' in a dry shady spot on a tree limb, root, or firm surface. They will quickly try to dig into the soil if they can. On a tree root they usually crawl in an upward direction. When chicks are present, you can offer more— but observe that other birds are not stealing the worms as you walk away.

Crows are very clever and must not be allowed any treats. They will never forget. Be sure to watch for a few minutes.

I am often asked if bluebirds will become dependent on mealworms. They will still hunt for natural food even when a dish of mealies is always present. They will not stop hunting.

Keeping 500, 1,000, or even 3,000 medium size mealworms in good condition is not easy. Put them in a plastic container such as a kitty litter tray with an inch or more of wheat bran, cornmeal, chicken mesh or oatmeal. Wheat bran can be purchased very cheaply at feed stores.

Moisture is essential and commonly provided by pieces of carrot, potato, celery or apple — but you can use almost any vegetable or fruit.

Don't get the meal too moist or the worms will die. After a day or two of feeding you can refrigerate the container of mealworms but remove the moist food first. It will cause excess moisture in the meal in the refrigerator.

Best temperature is 45° to 50° at which the worms become dormant and last for months. The container must have air holes. Mealworms

kept in the refrigerator should be taken out for one day a week and fed to keep them in good condition. If you don't want them in the refrigerator, store them at room temperature and keep feeding them. A garage in summer is too hot for mealworms.

Mealworms cannot climb the sides of smooth open plastic pans with 2" or higher sides so a lid is not needed. As the droppings accumulate in the bottom of the pan, it will start to smell. Sift this out and start with a fresh pan of meal.

Also, if they start to smell musty, the meal may have gotten too moist. Sift and start fresh. Medium mealworms will grow and change into pupas in a few weeks. The birds do not eat the pupa so refrigerate the mealies to stop their growth and put them in dormancy.

I have observed many people caring for mealworms. Far too often the conditions in the mealworm container are appalling. Keep a good amount of fresh meal in the pan and sift when it smells.

Feeding mealworms can save bluebird lives but there is a real down side as well. While the birds are concentrating on picking up the worms they are more vulnerable to hawk attacks. Don't always put the mealworms in the same spot and try to put them where a hawk couldn't swoop in and grab the bluebird. This danger is very real!

For more information see [www.sialis.org/feeder.htm](http://www.sialis.org/feeder.htm)

I use the rectangular shaped wire feeder with square openings from Bluebird Nut <http://www.tmbstudios.com/products.asp?cat=13>

The round design looks very good.

To make your own feeder <http://md.fpemad.com/p2/feeder.htm>

The bluebird feeder that is shaped like a birdhouse and has Plexiglas sides and wood ends with round entrance holes does not work very well. It confuses the birds.



## In Honor of Our Service Personnel Overseas

By Michael G. Spohn

I am an avid woodworker and I truly enjoy building nest boxes. I received a call last August from Jeanne Hitchman, Career Preparation Coordinator for the Capistrano Unified School District.

Jeanne asked if I would be willing to donate 25 of my nestbox kits to the students in the special needs program. These students were preparing for a Christmas bazaar and they wanted to assemble nestboxes to sell so they could raise money for their end-of-year picnic.

I said sure—and went to work. My nestbox kits consist of pre-cut pieces with the back, top, and Purvis hanger pre-assembled. All holes are pre-drilled and counter-sunk, and the door has the hole pre-drilled and the nestling grooves on the back of the door are pre-cut.

Included in the kit is the required 18 weather-proof screws, the door screw-eye, a small tube of wood glue and a piece of 100 grit sandpaper.



**Semper Fi Nestbox**

These kits are perfect for students with limited mobility or motor skills because it is easy for them to screw the kit together.

The project was a huge success. According to Jeanne, all the students had a great time assembling the kits.

I made sure each nestbox had an FAQ brochure from the Southern CA Bluebird Club, that emphasizes the importance of nestbox placement and monitoring.

One of the kits ended up in the hands of a very creative student. To honor the Marines overseas, this student gave the box a custom Marine Corp makeover.

What a terrific idea!

So cheers to all our service personnel overseas. We are praying for your safety and look forward to your return home.

## Cavity Nesting Raptors

(Cont. Page-4)

We also observed another unusual behavior that I had not seen before. Some females laid a second clutch of eggs with one or two of her owlets too young to fledge still in the box from her first nest attempt.

If I were not banding all the adult and young owlets, I would not know who was in the boxes for the second nesting. I might add that I banded my 10,000th barn owl in 2006, which is a mile-stone that I never believed I would reach.

This year the effects of '06' floods, and drought conditions that we had in the winter of '07' has caused both my barn owls and screech owls to have very few nest attempts during the '07' nesting season.

My barn owl nest boxes usually have an average occupancy rate during the nesting season in the 85% range. This year the occupancy rate was only 39%. There seemed to be a good number of adults in the boxes early in the season, but they just did not lay eggs.

Apparently their food base has not recovered enough for them to initiate nesting and many adults may not have survived the '06' floods and the "07" drought due to starvation.

I usually have from four to eight screech owl pairs nest with me every year in some of my wood duck boxes. In 2006 I only had three screech owls nest with me

and in one box all four owlets died and only one fledged from another. This year I banded 14 new adult screech owls and recaptured 5 adults banded in previous years, but only had one pair nest and they fledged four owlets.

The rains in '06' also had an effect on my large kestrel project (132 kestrel boxes) in the low foothills east of Merced. The rains caused arthropods, which kestrels depend on to feed their young, to hatch up to six weeks late. This caused the kestrels to lay fewer eggs, desert nests with eggs more often and fledge fewer young.

Many young kestrels died in many

(Cont. Page—10)

## California Bluebird Recovery Program County Coordinators

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Alameda	Livermore	Ray Fontaine	925-447-0213	rayfontaine1@comcast.net
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Butte	Oroville	Emily Harbison		
Calaveras	Angles Camp	Jack Lynch	209-736-2349	jackplynch@sbcglobal.net
Contra Costa	Pleasant Hill	Georgette Howington	925-686-4392	georgette@birdscape.net
El Dorado	Somerset	Hatch Graham	530 621-1833	birdsfly@innercite.com
Lassen	Susanville	Tom Rickman	530-251-4949	trickman@fs.fed.us
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Madera	Coarsegold	William Righ		
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Tehama	Red Bluff	Pete Flower	530-527-0392	
Tulare	Visalia	Peter Morrison	209-733-1154	
Tuolumne	Soulsbyville	Kathleen & Andrew Aldrich	209-536-1515	
Ventura	Camarillo	Jan Wasserman	805-987-3928	jan@treeswallows.org
Yuba	Wheatland	Helen Goforth	530-633-4094	rhgobirding@comcast.net

### Cavity Nesting Raptors

(Cont. Page-4)

nest boxes which I had almost never seen in past years. Kestrels are very good parents and as a rule will fledge all their young that hatch. On a good note, my kestrels had a good nesting year this year with their arthropods hatching out two weeks earlier than on a normal year, and the grasses were shorter due to the drought which made hunting very

easy for them.

To sum up, I hope that we have a normal rain fall this winter '08' and that the mammal population builds up again so my screech and barn owls can get back to having a good nesting season. It will be interesting to see who shows up to nest in

2008--owls that I banded in previous years or new owls that have dispersed from other areas of the valley. I have been banding cavity nesting birds for 35 years and I have seen many changes through the years, but none as devastating as in the '06' and '07' nesting seasons for my raptors.

## California Bluebird Recovery Program—Contributors

### July 2007—January 2008

Margaret Colbert	Alameda	Tim Fitzer	Sacramento
Charles Lowrie	Amador	Ken Head	Sacramento
Meg Bogue	Butte	Sheryn Scherer	San Diego
Bob Carlton	Contra Costa	Nanc Arbuckle	San Mateo
John & Marcia Cutter	Contra Costa	Cindy Lockhart	San Mateo
Toni Link	Contra Costa	M.J Walter	San Mateo
Sam Sperry	Contra Costa	Joanne Benedict	Santa Barbara
Verna Roberts	Contra Costa	Joan Loney	Santa Clara
Sonya Adamson	El Dorado	Marvin & June Schellhous	Placer
Kurt & Evelyn Davis	El Dorado	Melvin C Johnson	Riverside
Dick Day	El Dorado	Tim Fitzer	Sacramento
Barbara Ingle	El Dorado	Ken Head	Sacramento
Nancy Rogers	El Dorado	Sheryn Scherer	San Diego
Charles Meyer	Los Angeles	Nanc Arbuckle	San Mateo
Richard Moore	Los Angeles	Cindy Lockhart	San Mateo
Walter Sakai	Los Angeles	M.J Walter	San Mateo
Barbara Stutzman	Maricopa	Joanne Benedict	Santa Barbara
Richard Brewster	Orange	Joan Loney	Santa Clara
David Carder	Orange	Mark & Leila Sutherland	Santa Clara
Fran Dow	Orange	Steve Wright	Santa Clara
Earl Garrison	Orange	Larry Jordan	Shasta
James & Ramona Richardson	Orange	Patricia & Michael Hickey	Sonoma
Marvin & June Schellhous	Placer	Richard Kempton	Ventura
Melvin C Johnson	Riverside	Helen Goforth	Yuba
		Dale Whitmore	Yuba

## Danger at Easter

(Cont. Page-6)

People have no idea that these things happen and so are very careless with litter. If they knew the danger, most people would pick up every piece.

Let's spread the word. If each reader of this newsletter would send the following sample letter to the editor of their local and large regional newspaper, the whole state could be educated. Won't you take a minute, tailor this letter to your community and send it. The ideal timing would be Spring—a week or so before Easter. Do it again next year and every year.

- Sample Letter to Editor -

### EASTER GRASS KILLS NESTING BIRDS

As a volunteer with a bird conservation program I have seen the deaths caused when birds use strings to

build their nests. They are readily attracted to discarded pieces of Easter grass, fishing line, frayed blue tarp strings, kite string, gift wrap ribbon, and strings of all sorts.

Chicks toddling and turning in the nest get their feet tangled and they die a gruesome death of starvation—unable to leave the nest. Adult birds are trapped, as well, as they carry the strings through the twigs and branches during nest construction.

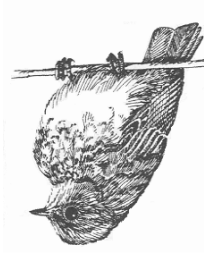
At Easter time many people take Easter baskets with plastic grass to parks. The strings get spread all over the lawns and the birds readily gather it.

I would encourage all readers to pick up every string left by some-

one who may not be aware of the danger. It will prevent birds from adding dangerous material to their nests. Park goers may not give birds a second thought, but their melodious songs and flits of color through dappled sunlight unconsciously combine into the rich tapestry of sights and sounds that let us know we have spent a wonderful day in the park. PICK UP ALL STRINGS, ALWAYS.

Drop me an email if you send a letter to the editor and where it was published.

[suebulger@gmail.com](mailto:suebulger@gmail.com)



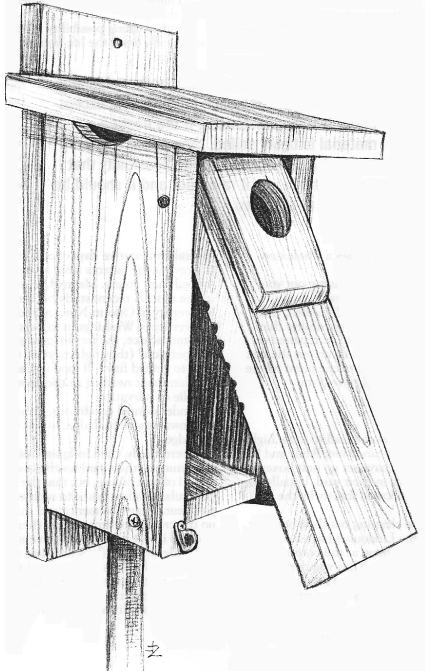
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