

**Call for Annual Reports**

**SUCCESS OR FAILURE? WE NEED TO KNOW**

Another season is past and we need a reckoning. Was it a success or failure, or somewhere in between? Which ever way we need your report. Early reports seem to indicate a variety of conditions up and down the State. Our bluebirds were early in the Southland, late in mid-State. Ventura was late with nesting swallows while farther north they arrived earlier than any of the past seven years.

Unexpected die-offs occurred for some, bringing ques-

tions and disappointments. Other weather-related losses were predictable, perhaps unavoidable but nevertheless frustrating to our conscientious landlords.

So how did you fare? The annual report form is on page 7 in case you lost the last one. Take a few minutes to fill yours out and mail it, as usual to **Don Yoder**, our Program Director, or to your County Coordinator. For those of you who would rather email, follow the same format and include all information. Thanks for your help.



*\$2.50 per issue  
suggested donation*

## BLUEBIRDS FLY!

**California Bluebird Recovery Program's newsletter**

—assisted by Mt Diablo Audubon Society & Audubon~California  
—an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

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

**Call for new volunteers**

To all CBRP monitors, this is a call for your assistance. As each year in the nestbird productive cycle comes to a close, you can see the fruits of our labors—many more new cavity-nesters who will be back next year looking for a home. However unless each of us expands our trails or introduces bluebirding to new people, we will fail to keep up with the increasing population.

Finding new monitors is also necessary make up for normal attrition, through people moving away or retiring from bluebirding. The question is, therefore, how do we do this? What we do in April through July is of vital interest to us and maybe of passing interest to friends and relatives; but how do we alert other people who might become interested if only they knew about what we do?

Several methods have been originated by monitors in the Orange County area of southern California with some success as follows:

1. *Print business cards* identifying yourself as a bluebird volunteer with your name, address, home number and email address on it. Carry them with you as you make your rounds and give them to anyone you meet who seems interested. Also tell them to pass the word to any of their friends or relatives.

2. *Hold parking lot workshops* and give away free literature and nestbox plans, talk about what we do and why; show nestboxes and photos of nests and eggs in hopes that someone will want to get involved.

3. *Make 8½" x 11" stand-up posters* with a picture of a bluebird, a few identifying words and some of your business cards and place on cashier countertops at businesses in your area. The idea is to get people to contact you; the rest is up to you and how good a salesperson you are.

4. *Volunteer to talk to organizations*—schools, Boy Scout groups,

*~ continued on page 2*

**STRANGE DEATHS, HEAT WAVES VEX MONITORS**

*~by Bob Franz, and monitors' reports*

**Peter Wetzel**, Orange Co., writes: "I am distressed. I checked boxes at Holy Sepulcher Cemetery on 5/17 just before leaving on vacation and had most of the boxes well along with healthy clutches. I carefully oiled the rags on the hangers to guard against ants as weather became warmer. On my return, I checked the boxes and found that 6 of 12 active nests had only dead young—the whole clutch or most of it, at least. Some were quite old, having full bluebird outer feathers but badly desiccated and in a few cases the number of dead was less than the number hatched giving some hope that some fledged. In one box, the dead were less than a week old and full of maggots still. Only one box showed any sign of predators—mites on underside of box.

*~continued on page 9*

# Volunteers

~from page 1

church groups, etc. and show them nestboxes and photos of nests and eggs in hopes that someone will want to get involved.

These are just four ways to approach this. The idea here is to get someone to volunteer at any level. Often a volunteer will get hooked, as **Bob Franz** in Orange County did.

Under the tutelage of **Dick Purvis** Bob started in 1997 and monitored 19 nestboxes at a golf course near his home. This year he is monitoring 146 nestboxes in 3 golf courses, a cemetery, and numerous parks and green belts.

We're sure many of you started with one or two nestboxes and now monitor considerably more.

Yes, monitoring cavity-nesters is rewarding work, let's hope we can spread the word, and if you have any ideas, please pass them on to **Don Yoder** or **Hatch Graham** - see box in column 3 for how to reach them.

# Late fledges

CBRP monitors were queried on whether they were seeing increased numbers of late fledglings—nestlings that were still in the nest a week or so after the rest had fledged.

**Joe Chandler** in Orange County noted late fledges in 2 of his 20 nestboxes this year.

**Dick Purvis**, also of Orange County, has noted 27-day-old fledglings and wonders if the accepted average fledging age of 22 days is accurate. He also thinks late fledging may have a lot to do with the available food supply.

**Jean Beaton**, LA, and **Kevin Putman**, Yuba/Sutter, haven't seen an inordinate amount of late fledges.

Others commented on generally late nestings. **George Goodwin**, El Dorado, had a nest started in late June and the 6 chicks didn't fledge till July 27. "I never had any that late before..." says George. Also in El Dorado, **Ray DiBasilio** banded his last bluebirds on August 5, 2002! They fledged sometime the following week.

# California Bluebird Recovery Program

Founded in 1994, supported by Audubon ~California 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 had located and reported on more than 4,000 nestboxes by the end of 2001, with more than 17,000 cavity-nesters fledged—nearly half of them 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 quarterly newsletter, is available for a donation of \$5 or more made payable to "MDAS—Bluebirds" and mailed to CBRP, 2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1, Walnut Creek, CA 94595. Donations are tax-deductible.

## FATHER SNITCHES ON SON: LOOSE CAT!

**Bob Franz**, our roving reporter, couldn't pass up a good story but we don't know if his son will appreciate it. He writes: Yes, **Norman Franz** is my son and he and his wife **Judi** have become dedicated bluebirders. He called the other day to relate an interesting story.

"When we got home from work at about 4:30, we found an adult female bluebird inside our kitchen on the sink counter. It kept flying at the window trying to get out. We opened our patio door, and finally, it found the open door and flew out. One of the nestboxes we monitor is in a small park across the street behind our house. Sure enough, the freed bird made a beeline for this area and landed in the tree where one of our nestboxes is hung.

"How did the bluebird get into our house? Well, we have two cats and a small swinging pet door in the patio door so the cats can come and go while we're away. And these cats act like a lot of cats, they catch living things like birds and lizards. In the case of birds, one of them—Tuesdae—usually kills and eats them. The other—Ruby—usually just plays with them. Fortunately for this bluebird it must have been caught by Ruby as it was virtually undamaged—except for maybe its nerves—and was able to fly strongly when it was freed.

"We have no idea how long it was in the house, but there were quite a bit of droppings in the kitchen so we suspect it was a prisoner for some time. We shall name this bird—Lucky."

## California Bluebird Recovery Program

**Don Yoder**

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**BLUEBIRDS FLY!**

**Hatch & Judy Graham**

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birdsfly@innercite.com

DON YODER'S

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

The nesting season has come to an end—gee! already? It's therefore time also for monitors to wrap up their figures for the year and forward their Annual Report to complete the paperwork. How is your trail looking? Any boxes needing repair? Parents still hanging around the old homestead even though the kids have departed and are able to feed themselves? Must be time to run the totals and complete that Report Form #2 and send it off to CBRP at the address at the bottom. We want to see it. And remember—check your expiration date on the label of Bluebirds Fly—save a stamp by sending your renewal check with your Annual Report. We think we can digest 2 different enclosures in a single envelope. (Make your check payable to *MDAS Bluebirds*, please.)



Among the early reporters, **Donna Alger**, Santa Clara, says the battles for survival carried over from last year: The first clutch disappeared but the parents tried again—2<sup>nd</sup> clutch hatched and fledged. The second box hatched its clutch but they failed to survive. An extension on the third box opening should block invasive visitors next year.



In Contra Costa, **Toni Link** reports non-hatching of 5 eggs of varied sizes, of which one was much smaller. Several had pale discoloration over about 30% of the surface.



In one early report out of Orange County, **Betty Lovejoy**, working with **Linda Violet** used an elevated 2-hole box to fledge 13 birds from 2 clutches of 7 and 6 eggs respectively. Learning that her appearance

may mean food, they assemble around the water bowl—up to 8 at a time—and flutter within reach. Befitting her name, she has fallen in love with a bird. A plastic pump water gun has proven very effective in deterring a neighbor's 2 cats that attempt climbs to the single box.



**June Schellhaus**, Placer, had 5 species make nesting attempts but some losses due to predation in the boxes. She plans to attach wire guards before next nesting season. She found no production whatever by a barn owl who appeared to be brooding but quite nervous about any visitors to the barn.



Perhaps this is a transformation to another life: **Susan Hoover**, San Mateo, has a NABS box that hatched one of two eggs but the youngster died. She buried it in a flower bed and now it's a nasturtium.



Quoted from *Bird Watcher's Digest* is an article from Great Britain having to do with claims of predation of small birds by magpies. The usual conflict between friends of small birds and the protectors of all native birds is underway: Basically, what steps can legally be taken to protect the small birds vs how does one deal with the big yellow-billed invaders? Some of our members live in areas where magpies also live and may have to take special measures to protect nestboxes from yet another predator that tries to invade boxes containing small young. If magpies have become a problem for you, we'd like to hear about it.



We reported earlier about the  
*continued on page 4*

## Support our associates



Founded in 1978, the **North American Bluebird Society (NABS)** is a non-profit organization determined to increase the populations of the three species of bluebirds on this continent. Inasmuch as the populations of these birds have diminished due to the maladroitness of human beings, as well as natural disasters, the society strives to explain the importance of preserving native cavity-nesters.

The society works within the bounds of effective conservation to study obstacles impeding bluebird recovery and to promote ideas and actions which might reduce their effect.

Membership is \$15. NABS's mailing address is The Wilderness Center, PO Box 244, Wilmot, OH 44689-0244.



There are local chapters of the **National Audubon Society (NAS)** in all fifty states, Guam, and Latin America. In California there are over fifty local chapters. Chapters have newsletters, monthly programs, and field trips to local areas of interest. The Mt Diablo chapter actively assists **CBRP** with its business administration; Audubon ~California with mailing.

To join NAS, contact your local Audubon Chapter or mail new member dues of \$20 to NAS, PO Box 51003, Boulder, CO 80323-1003, which includes a quarterly magazine as well as membership privileges in your local Audubon chapter.



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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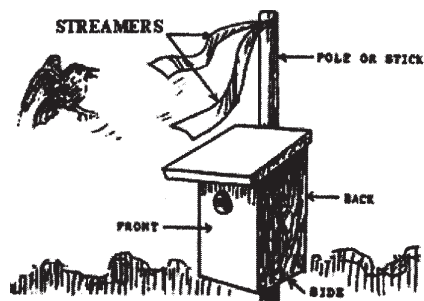
North Carolina representative of *Sialia sialis* that was inspecting a nestbox on January 1, flew off to see about arranging financing, and later built a nest and fledged a family. It must have been satisfying because the first family fledged and was followed by a second brood in the same box. The older youngsters hung around to help with feeding of the newbies.



**Bob Franz**, one of our trail monitors in Orange County, has taken on the daunting task of helping the Editor update our records. The details will include verifying e-mail and snail mail addresses, phone numbers, etc. You may already have heard from him. If your own contact information is presently incorrect or out of date, please contact him at BOBFRANZ13@aol.com. Information you furnish will **not** be sold or given to any other party(ies) outside of our Program. And thanks for your cooperation.



From **Gwen Newton-Denton's** web page comes a reminder of a "sparrow spooker" that first appeared in *Sialia* magazine in May 1985. She got it from a former NABS president, **Lillian Lund-Files** who reports, "I personally had luck with this idea,



but used plastic flags."

Gwen says, This is a field-tested, 100% effective device used to deter sparrows from your bluebird nests.

This simple home-made device has been used for over six years without an attack or disturbing the bluebirds' nesting habits or behavior. Any bluebird enthusiast can construct a sparrow spooker from the following readily available materials: 12" of 1"x1" wood (or enough to raise the spooker 8" above the roofline of your bluebird house); two 12" dowels; 6 strips of 2"x 6" silver mylar (can be recycled from boxed wine liners, mylar balloons etc. In an emergency you can use aluminum foil for a temporary fix.)

Step #1 - Drill two holes the diameter of the dowels into the piece of wood. Step #2 - Glue the dowels into the wood strip. Step #3 - Use duct tape to attach the mylar strips at even intervals (3 per dowel). Step #4 - Mount the spooker to the back of your bluebird house so that there is a distance of 8" between the roofline and the top of the device. This will allow the mylar strips to blow freely in the wind. *Very Important!* In order to prevent disturbing your bluebird's normal nesting behavior you must mount the device *after* the eggs have been laid. It must be taken down immediately after fledging.

"I have used this device successfully for 4 years. All of my nest boxes with bluebird nests get a "sparrow spooker." In over 50 nest boxes protected in this manner, I have *never* had a sparrow attack or bluebirds abandon their nest..."

You can email Gwen at:

daltd9@msn.com

(You might also try hanging 2 or 3 of those aol promo CD-ROMs from the dowel—some orchardists are using them—Ed.)



**Helpers.** After your first bluebirds have fledged, you can often tell if

you're having a second brood by watching to see how many birds are feeding the new chicks. Often the first brood of chicks will help the adults feed the second brood. **Ed & Lee Jackson**, El Dorado, watched this happen, and "at times we would have 6 or 7 bluebirds at a time using the birdbath, waiting for their 'turns' in a nearby lilac bush... We didn't see much of the Oak Titmice or the Bewick's Wrens once their chicks fledged."



From Ventura County, **Jan Wasserman** writes: "OK, I'll start with the good news. The Spanish Hills golf course is fantastic. We have three boxes with healthy Tree Swallows (TRES) babies, and other boxes thriving with house wrens. Sadly, the first TRES clutch hatched at Spanish Hills died from an ant attack. But the great people at SH treated all the posts with Tangle foot, and will keep it fresh through out the season!

"The second good news is that there have been two more Saticoy [Ventura Co.]birds recaptured in Irvine [Orange Co.]!!! That's the fun stuff.

"Third, we have caught more adults this year than ever before, we are well over 100 in Ventura County, and the numbers are pretty good in Orange County as well."

[Jan goes on to report on high mortality which we include on page 6, she continues:]

"It's been hectic, and sad, and that's why there hasn't been an update lately [on our website.]"

<http://treeswallows.org>



**Pairing.** Last issue, **Hatch Graham** offered the opinion that diversity could be achieved by simply pair-

~continued on page 5

## MORE NOTES...

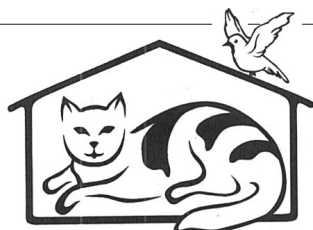
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 ing standard-sized nestboxes. **Rachel Talbot**, Amador, reports that last year she had White-breasted Nuthatches nest in a box that was only 30' away from another box. Bluebirds nested in the second box about 3 weeks after the nuthatches took up residence.



For me the most exciting development this year is that I have a Western Screech Owl spending a lot of time in a Kestrel nesting box about 25' up in an oak tree, says **Bob Franz**.



Around here we can learn something or pick up ideas nearly every day. A couple of such gems arrived in the same day in mid-September. One is from the newsletter of the Schoharie County Bluebird Society, Howes Cave, NY 12092. This one has to do with the annual problem of lassoing those very important Annual Nestbox Reports from monitors. Their Editor believes less interest is being shown in completing reports, as the bluebird population improves and they are less rare. Accordingly, he will now "rely on mailed in surveys alone, whereas we used to do a large number of follow-up phone surveys." Our own Editor has been working far too hard at chasing reports—I suggest he follow the quoted procedure above. The time for mailing your report has already practically passed.



**CATS INDOORS!**

THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAFER BIRDS & CATS

You won't believe this one but it sounds pretty reliable. Two birders, Msrs. **Winter & Taylor**, in Franklin County, Missouri, presently manage 246 nestboxes and fledged 2147 youngsters this year. A couple of tips: they coat the interior surfaces of boxes with liquid Ivory soap to repel wasps. And they attach pieces of foam siding on the outside of some boxes to provide better insulation.. Quoting from their report, "...the normal number of bluebird broods each summer is two or three, ....our pairs... "often have four broods, and this year despite the heat, there were a couple of hardworking females that raised five broods." Number 8 among their suggestions, "if you want Bluebirds? Get rid of your cat!"

Well, we've preached that practice for a long time. Or, an alternative: keep the cat indoors.



The above report comes from a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* issue of September 9, 2002. Copies of the article were received from friends by both **Bob Franz**, Orange Co., and your Program Director, Contra Costa. It's so great to have friends.



With regard to our front page call for volunteers, you may have not read, or forgotten, our announcement that we have at hand two aids for your use in presenting programs on behalf of bluebirds and cavity nesters in general. One is the NABS 35-mm colored slide set with the cassette narrative tape and a printed script. The other is a colorful vinyl CBRP banner, approx. 5' x 2'. Contact us for further details if you would like to use either or both of these presentation aids. Allow enough lead time for USPS delivery to you; we'll pay the postage to you.



You may not have completed totaling your production of eggs, chicks, & fledglings for the year to get the Annual Report Form #2 dropped in the mail, but—add to your list of "To Do's" A note of which boxes you've been visiting needing minor repairs—or even major overhauls, in order to be ready for the next occupants. While the weather remains good it is probably a good idea to get that job at least started. Any weak spots in the material or assembly of a box can be an invitation to a predator to take advantage of the loose screw or woodpecker hole that isn't a part of the original design of the box.

And at some point between now and the start of the new season the old nest and dirt ought to be taken away. How nice for new tenants to be greeted with a clean, sound nestbox for the '03 families. (And how good you'll feel to have that job behind you!!)



If you have a web site on which to share your birding activities and results we'd like to see it and publish it here in *BLUEBIRDS FLY!* And we invite you to see a really extensive and professional display maintained by **Linda Violet**, Orange. She has reported on 3 years' of maintenance of her trails, problems and solutions. Beautiful photos too.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~lviolet/>



A number of monitors have been successful in helping bluebirds when harsh weather strikes in winter. If your birds are subject to severe weather and short food supplies, you might want to keep some mealworms on hand.

Check your local bird supply store or Sunshine Mealworms, 7263 Gallon House Rd, Silverton OR 97381; 1-(800)-322-1100.

[www.sunshinemealworms.com](http://www.sunshinemealworms.com)

## SECOND BROOD BY OAK TITMOUSE IS CONFIRMED

For some time, nestbox landlords have suspected a late nesting by an Oak Titmouse might be a second brood, but no one has been sure.

On several occasions, the titmouse has been seen to build a replacement nest and have a second brood after losing the first. But two successful broods in one season has remained but theory until this year.

In *The Birds of North America*, No.485, *The Oak Titmouse and the Juniper Titmouse*, (2000) the author, Carla Cicero reports "...some evidence that pairs may raise 2 broods on occasion."

**Carol Willburn**, El Dorado, has had titmice for over 3 years and has **Hatch Graham** over to band them.

A female Oak Titmouse ...930-99243, was banded 19 Apr 2000, while incubating in a nestbox in an oak-pine woodland by Carol's home off Sand Ridge Road near Somerset, CA. Approximately a year later, on 12 Apr 2001, the bird was recaptured while incubating in another nestbox 83m NW of the original banding. The first location was on a wooden post. The second location was a box mounted on a studded-T fence post.

On 29 Apr 2002, the mother hen had moved 5m S to another nestbox erected in late 2001 and attached to a large California black oak. She was recaptured while incubating 4 eggs. On 3 May, the 4 chicks were banded and subsequently fledged. Then, on 9 June, she was again recaptured in the same nestbox on the same nest.

A small quantity of fur had been added but no major additions had been made to the nest. She had 6 eggs. On 18 Jun, the six chicks were banded and subsequently fledged.

Second brood confirmed.

### Opinion:

## ANNUAL REPORT FORMAT

As many of you saw, last year's Annual Report included monitors' names and totals in order by the number of Fledges per Box. This was significantly different than previous years when names were in alphabetical order by County. We wondered how you felt about this, so we asked. Though responses were few, there were a few interesting ones.

**David "Tex" Houston** of Santa Clara County liked the Fledges per Box sort because it indicates which trails or geographic areas are the most productive. But he also recognizes that it becomes a little more difficult to find specific names. What he really would go for is to have our information in a Geographic Information System (GIS) layer to observe which areas are doing better than others.

**Walt Carnahan** of Nevada County is afraid that using Fledges per Box could lead to gaming the system by having some monitors not reporting non-productive boxes. I'm sure that none of you would do that—would you?

Although **Kevin Putman**, who reports on Sutter and Yuba County nestboxes, liked the alphabetical sort best, he thought that the Fledge per Box sort would have more meaning if idle boxes were not counted and that a deduction was made when alien birds were yielded.

But with all these interesting suggestions, the final tally was: Alphabetical-3, Fledges per Box-1, Total Fledges-1 and No opinion-1.

I urge we go back to the alphabetical order but incorporate other concepts if possible.

~Bob Franz

## Entomologist reports on recent blow fly research

Dr. **Terry Whitworth**, a leading researcher in the field of bird nest blow flies (*Protocalliphora*), has just published a paper describing 2 new species in North America.

*Protocalliphora bennetti* is found in chickadees and wrens and ranges from VA to AK. *P. rugosa* is in Purple Martins and Tree Swallows and ranges from OR to BC Canada.

He has no life history studies on these new species, so he suggests anyone studying nesting birds in these groups could make observations.

His paper is titled "*Two new spe-*

*cies of North American Protocalliphora...from bird nests.*" He'd be happy to send reprints to potential researchers. He has several more papers in review. He says, "We still have 2 species that have never been found in bird nests so hosts and puparia are unknown. I continue to offer identification services gratis to any researcher who would like to study this parasite in their nesting birds." Terry Whitworth, 2533 Inter Ave, Puyallup, WA 98372

email: wpctwbug@aol.com

Website:

<http://www.birdblowfly.com>

# California Bluebird Recovery Program ANNUAL REPORT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Location of Trail (or Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

No. Boxes: 1-Standard: \_\_\_ ; 2-Larger than Std: \_\_\_ ; 3-Smaller than Std: \_\_\_ ; Total: \_\_\_

No. Box pairs (2 boxes within 15 feet of each other): \_\_\_\_\_

		1st Brood	2nd Brood	3d Brood	Total
Species:	No. Nests with 1 or more eggs:				
	No. Nests hatching 1 or more:				
Box Type No.:	No. Nests fledging 1 or more:				
Banding	No. Eggs laid:				
Adults: Chicks:	No. Chicks hatched:				
	No. Chicks fledged:				
Species:	No. Nests with 1 or more eggs:				
	No. Nests hatching 1 or more:				
Box Type No.:	No. Nests fledging 1 or more:				
Banding	No. Eggs laid:				
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Species:	No. Nests with 1 or more eggs:				
	No. Nests hatching 1 or more:				
Box Type No.:	No. Nests fledging 1 or more:				
Banding	No. Eggs laid:				
Adults: Chicks:	No. Chicks hatched:				
	No. Chicks fledged:				

If you haven't already reported, clip this form and send it in now







## Strange deaths, heat waves trouble monitors

~continued from page 1

Other boxes appear to have fledged all successfully.

“Have you seen other problems like this? This is the worst die off I have seen.

“I cleaned the boxes and there are adults about seemingly looking for nests. In the boxes which did not contain dead, second nests have been started, but the birds seemed to have avoided the boxes containing dead young.”

Bluebirder **Bob Franz**, Orange County, was also observing an inordinate number of dead WEBL nestlings this year, so with reports such as **Peter Wetzel**'s, he asked some of the CBRP faithful if their experience was similar.

**Dick Purvis**, OrangeCo., responded that he is also seeing a lot of nestling deaths with no apparent reason.

**Dianne McCleery** in Amador County said she experienced the same problem two years ago. But she suspects it might have been caused by too high temperatures at fledging time.

However **Kevin Putman**, reporting on 150+ nestboxes from Sutter/Yuba Counties, hasn't seen an inordinate number of dead nestlings with standard Zeleny NABS side-opening nestboxes.

**Jean Barton**, LA County, also has not seen any problems of this kind this year.

But **Jan Wassermann**, Ventura, early in the season, reported on her Tree Swallows experiencing “a tremendous amount of mortality this year, mostly unexplained. It looks like the nestlings that are dying are full of bacteria, the fatty areas are a greenish color instead of yellow. The mite infestation is high, and we are trying to keep it at bay with diatomaceous earth.”

**Irv Tiessen**, Alameda, wrote Bob: “I don't know whether you resolved the chick die-off question you posed earlier this year, but I kept an eye out and noted such instances, this nesting season.

Of the 175 boxes I monitored this season, 44 chicks perished in the nest. Of that number, 27 perished in nests that fledged sibling birds. It's also interesting to note, some of the chicks perished in incremental stages of aging, such as a dead chick at 15+ days, while other more aggressive siblings fledged from the nest. In my area, it looks like the availability of food and the survival of the fittest had a definite impact.”

As **Dianne McCleery** suggested, it's not unusual to hit a hot spell in the Sierra foothills in early July. **Doris & Bill Allison**, Amador Co., have a 40-box trail on their ranch located 3½ miles as the bluebird flies up Dry Creek above **Hatch & Judy Graham**'s 70-box trail on Hwy 124. In past years they have tacked large cardboard “sunbonnet” shades on their exposed boxes on both trails. This year, with 3 consecutive days of a record heat wave in the Sacramento Valley, Hatch decided to try evaporative cooling. Doris emailed:

“Hi! We will be interested to hear how your swamp cooler technique worked.”

She went on to list 5 boxes where Hatch had banded the nestlings; in 2, all had died, with 1 dead in 1 box and 2 dead in the other 2.

“At the beginning of the heat we had 8 boxes of bluebird hatchlings—13 died, 4 are still alive and 12 fledged. We had 4 boxes of swallow hatchlings—4 died, 2 are still alive and 6 fledged. In addition we had 2 swallow boxes with eggs—one had to be thrown out and one

hatched 2 out of 3. We had 1 box of flycatchers—1 died and 4 fledged. The boxes all had sunbonnets except the two swallow nests that had eggs (I didn't think they could possibly survive and hatch). The boxes that did the best were either ones that were almost old enough to fledge when the heat started or in locations where a hill or large oaks helped to shade them in the mid-to-late afternoon. In some instances part of the mature hatchlings fledged and part did not leave the box even though they looked mature enough—I suspect the parents couldn't afford to wait around and coax them any longer and left to save themselves and the ones who had fledged (again I'm applying human logic to birds). All of the surviving hatchlings look undersized and in the case of the eggs that hatched, those 2 took a week longer than what they should, based on when they were to hatch.”

Rather than put on sunbonnets, Hatch & Judy elected to try the swamp cooler approach. By soaking the nests in water, Hatch theorized that convective heat rising from the ground might flow through the drainage holes in the corners of the floor in his boxes, continue to rise through the box and out the vents. With low external humidity, it ought to cool the hatchlings in the nests.

(In the future he's considering a floor made entirely of hardware cloth covered with kraft paper until the nest is built by the birds at which time the paper would be removed. This would allow much more airflow.)

The heat wave hit on 7/9 and continued for 2 more days. Starting early in the morning, the heat registered 85° and rose to over 100° by noon. All three days registered between 105° and 111° in surrounding areas later in the afternoon.

~continued next page

## heat wave

~continued from page 9

While Hatch soaked the nests, Judy sprayed the chicks with a fine spray of water from a Windex bottle.

There were 10 Tree Swallow nests; of these, 5 had 19 birds 20 to 21 days old. All but 1 of these birds survived and the 1 that succumbed was abnormal and its death was probably not heat-related. At this age, if the young were reluctant to leave the nest, they were prodded into it in the belief that they would be safer outside of the boxes. All flew without any problem.

Swallows in 3 nests 13 to 15 days-old had more difficulty; of the 7 chicks involved, 2 fledged on their 16th day after a day and a half of heat. The other 5 succumbed after 2 days. Two nests with 8 chicks from 0 to 9 days old had 50% survival; 2 from each nest making it. The others lingered on after the heat wave but died the following week.

Results were similar in the 9 bluebird nests, though there was earlier fledging. Four nests had 14 and 15 day-old birds. One nest of 3 flew the 1st day; 9 birds flew the 2nd day, and 1 suffered through the 3rd day but still survived.

The middle group, 3 nests with 10 chicks 7 to 13 days old, like the swallows, all died though 2 lasted past the Grahams' last visit on the morning of 7/11; the 2 nests with 6 chicks only 2 or 3 days old had mixed success, 3 died with 1 lingering for another week, while 3 survived to fledge.

Hatch says it's hard to credit the swamp cooler technique though the close attention (monitoring 3 days in a row) and spraying the chicks possibly causing premature fledging may have saved the older birds. He says getting them out of the boxes early under these conditions was worthwhile.

## Surprise!

I drove through the gate, jumped out and closed it behind me. Nancy & Gordon Poer had invited me to come band their titmice. I pulled up to their box closest to the gate to see if the bluebirds had started a second brood—not yet; then drove on to the second box up their White Feather Ranch Road.

From the car, I saw the Oak Titmouse land on a twig in front of the nestbox mounted on a 4" dead tree about 7' high. It was one of my side-opening boxes they'd had for several years. The titmouse darted into the hole and immediately popped out again. He (or she?) sat on the twig tilting his head from side to side as if to get a better perspective of the box. Perhaps its mate is already inside feeding young, I thought. With luck, I might capture an adult in the box. (It's always more profitable to band the adults because they are more likely to return next year and be recaptured, giving us valuable information on longevity and site fidelity.)

I walked swiftly but quietly to the box and placed my left hand over the entrance. I removed the locking nail from the front and held it in my mouth while slipping my right hand in under the door. With open hand, I reached for the soft feathery touch of adult or baby birds.

Instead, I felt a large cool mass of smooth material—not unlike a handful of modeling clay. "What the H...?" I said, withdrawing my hand quickly.

Lifting the door higher, I peered in to see a lovely gopher snake coiled in a large wad in the corner of the box staring back at me and flicking her tongue.

I picked up an oak branch and lifted her out. All thirty-nine inches of her slithered away into the brush. No banding today. ~Hatch Graham

## AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY SEEKS ACTIVISTS

ABC has put more tools on their website so that **Cats Indoors! Campaign** supporters can be more effective. The following are now available at: <http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/catsindoors.htm>.

1. *Power Point slide show and Activist Guide*—a presentation and matching activist guide, "Conducting A Cats Indoors! Campaign In Your Community." A second slide show "Cat Predation on Wildlife, Managed Cat Colonies, and Better Solutions," is also available. These slide shows can be downloaded to your hard drive with full resolution graphics. They require Windows and Power Point 2000. Notes appear under each slide. You can copy the slide shows onto a CD and take them to a camera shop to be made into a hard-copy 35 mm slide show. The slide shows are also available on CD from ABC for \$5.00.

2. *Downloadable Brochure*—The very popular brochure, "Keeping Cats Indoors Isn't Just For The Birds" prints out in four color pages.

3. *Frequently Asked Questions About Domestic Cats*—These deal with keeping cats indoors and offers links to information on outdoor cat enclosures. The FAQs may be useful in dealing with your cat-owning neighbors.

4. *Sample Letters to the Editor*—there are two sample letters to the editor: one on the importance of keeping cats indoors, and one on trap/neuter/release efforts. Suggestions are given for effective letters.

5. *Take the Pledge and Supporter Registration*—this will enable ABC to get a better idea of how many people support keeping cats indoors, and also give them better information on who are activists and what they are doing to promote the campaign.

# The Noel Cat/Coon Guard

*Whenever a monitor reports a raid by raccoon or cat, Program Director Don Yoder invariably asks "Have you tried a Noel Coon Guard? Your Editor asked Don for more information and he reached into his archives and produced this document.*

## The Noel Guard Adapter

*by John Thompson, Minnesota*

A few years ago **Jim Noel**, of Ashland, IL, created a wiremesh (heavy hardware cloth) guard for use on the Peterson nestbox when predation problems occurred. The guard is a rectangular wire "box," 5½" x 5½" x 3½" which is stapled onto the existing nestbox door. Its effectiveness has been verified for some time by many bluebirders.

There were, however, some minor drawbacks. It was difficult to put in place, as it was usually necessary to shave the door sides to accommodate the extra thickness of wire and staples. This made it difficult to put on quickly, and could disrupt the box occupants. Also, the guard is applicable to only the Peterson box and is difficult to remove if that becomes necessary.

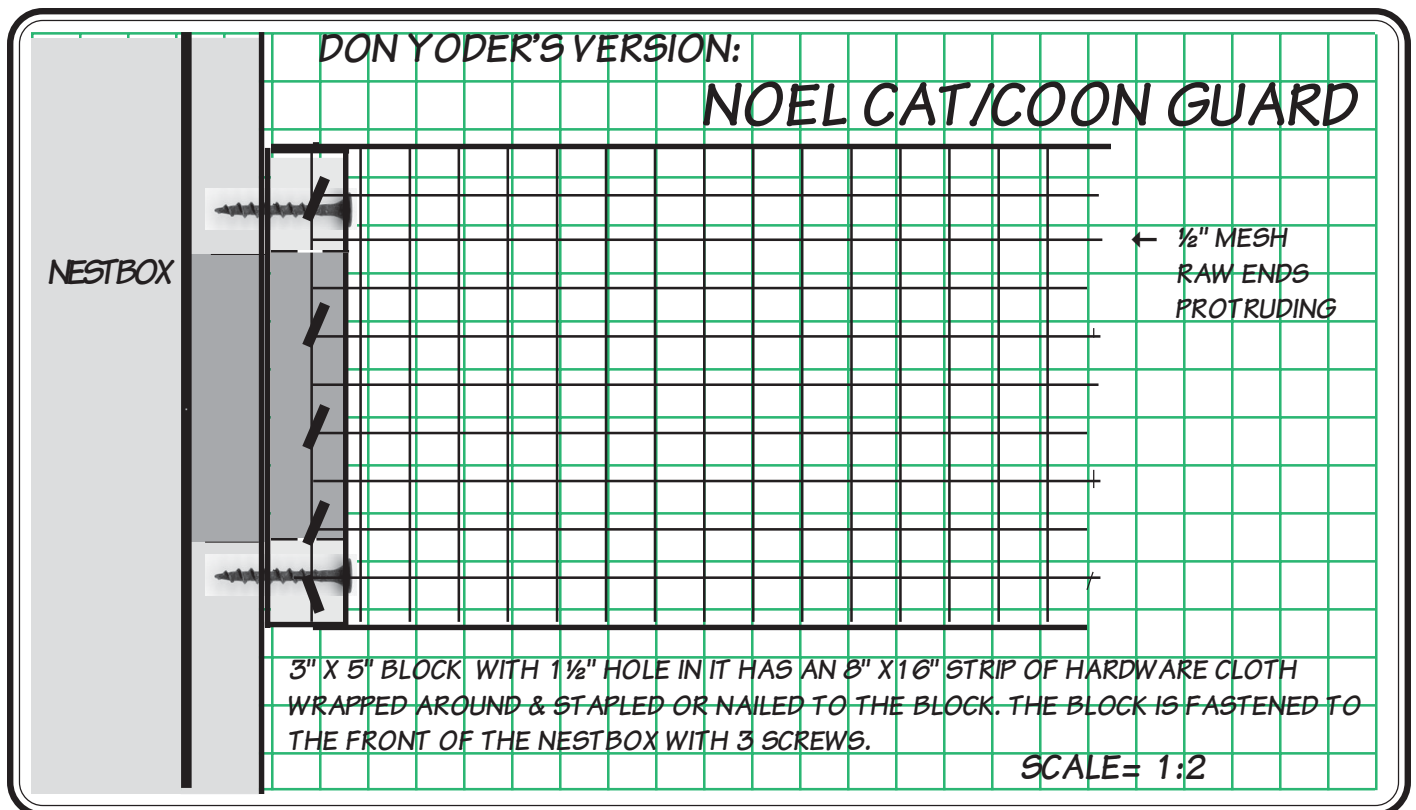
This summer, I used the Noel cat/coon guard with perfect success, but I modified it to adapt to nestbox fronts

of almost any dimension by putting it on a 3" x 5" piece of cedar (¾" thick) with a corresponding hole, and fastening this piece with 3 screws to the front of the nestbox, lining up the holes. It takes only seconds to put in place, with practically no disturbance to the occupants, without even opening the box. It is easily removed to be placed on another box. It is applicable to almost any nestbox with the exception of the slot type.

The best preventative measure, of course, is to keep predators from climbing in the first place, but that is not always possible. If your bluebird boxes have been plagued by predators, and you've tried everything else, give this a try. It just might be the answer you are looking for.

There was some apprehension about adding the extra thickness at the entrance hole, but closely observing after putting it in place, I am convinced it didn't bother the bluebirds one bit. There was usually only one tentative approach, but almost always the bird would enter the box on the second approach. The dimensions of the guard enable the bird to feed the young without always completely entering the box.

With the Noel guards, I have had no predation on bluebird nestboxes on land adjacent to the Minnesota River, a prime raccoon habitat.





# West Nile virus poses threat to birds, too

When California confirmed its first case of West Nile virus in August, it was bad medical news for humans, but even worse for birds.

The mosquito-borne virus has downed an astonishing variety of birds and poses a potentially mortal threat to the endangered California Condor because of its extremely low population.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the lead federal agency for protecting the health and safety of people, the West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito, and can infect people, horses, many types of birds, and some other animals.

## History

West Nile virus was first isolated from a febrile adult woman in the West Nile District of Uganda in 1937. The ecology was characterized in Egypt in the 1950s. The virus became recognized as a cause of severe human meningoencephalitis (inflammation of the spinal cord and brain) in elderly patients during an outbreak in Israel in 1957. Equine disease was first noted in Egypt and France in the early 1960s. The first appearance of WN virus in North America in 1999, with encephalitis reported in humans and horses, and the subsequent spread in the United States may be an important milestone in the evolving history of this virus.

## Symptoms

Most people who become infected with West Nile virus will have either no symptoms or only mild ones. However, on rare occasions, West

Nile virus infection can result in severe and sometimes fatal illnesses.

*There is no evidence to suggest that West Nile virus can be spread from person to person or from bird or mammal to human.*

Starting in the East, confirmed cases are most prevalent in the heart-

House Sparrow, and House Finch. There is no reason to believe western counterparts to these species are not also at risk.

## Detection

Nestbox monitors can play an important role in detecting West Nile virus through reporting dead birds to the State health department. Many species of birds get infected and die from West Nile virus. The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) has commenced an extensive monitoring effort for the virus. They call on you to report any Corvids—crows, ravens, magpies and jays—that have been dead for less than 24 hours and any other sick birds showing neurological distress. CDHS has established a toll-free line 1-877-WNV-BIRD for public reporting.

## Prevention

Human illness from WN virus is rare. The chance that any one person is going to become ill from a mosquito bite is low.

You can further reduce your chances of becoming ill by protecting yourself from mosquito bites. To avoid mosquito bites:

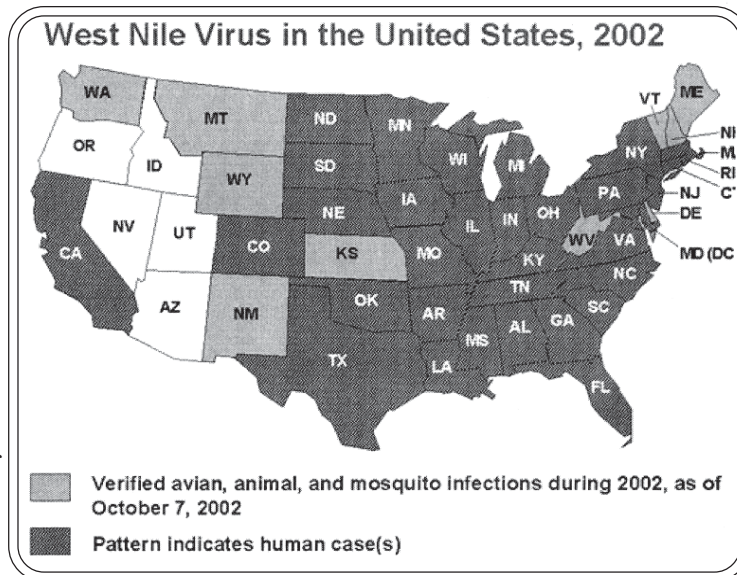
Apply insect repellent containing DEET when you're outdoors.

Wear long-sleeved clothes and long pants treated with repellents.

Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening, which are peak mosquito biting times.

Limit the number of places available for mosquitos to lay their eggs by eliminating standing water sources from around your home.

*Let's hope our birds will soon build up immunities to the virus.* —Ed.



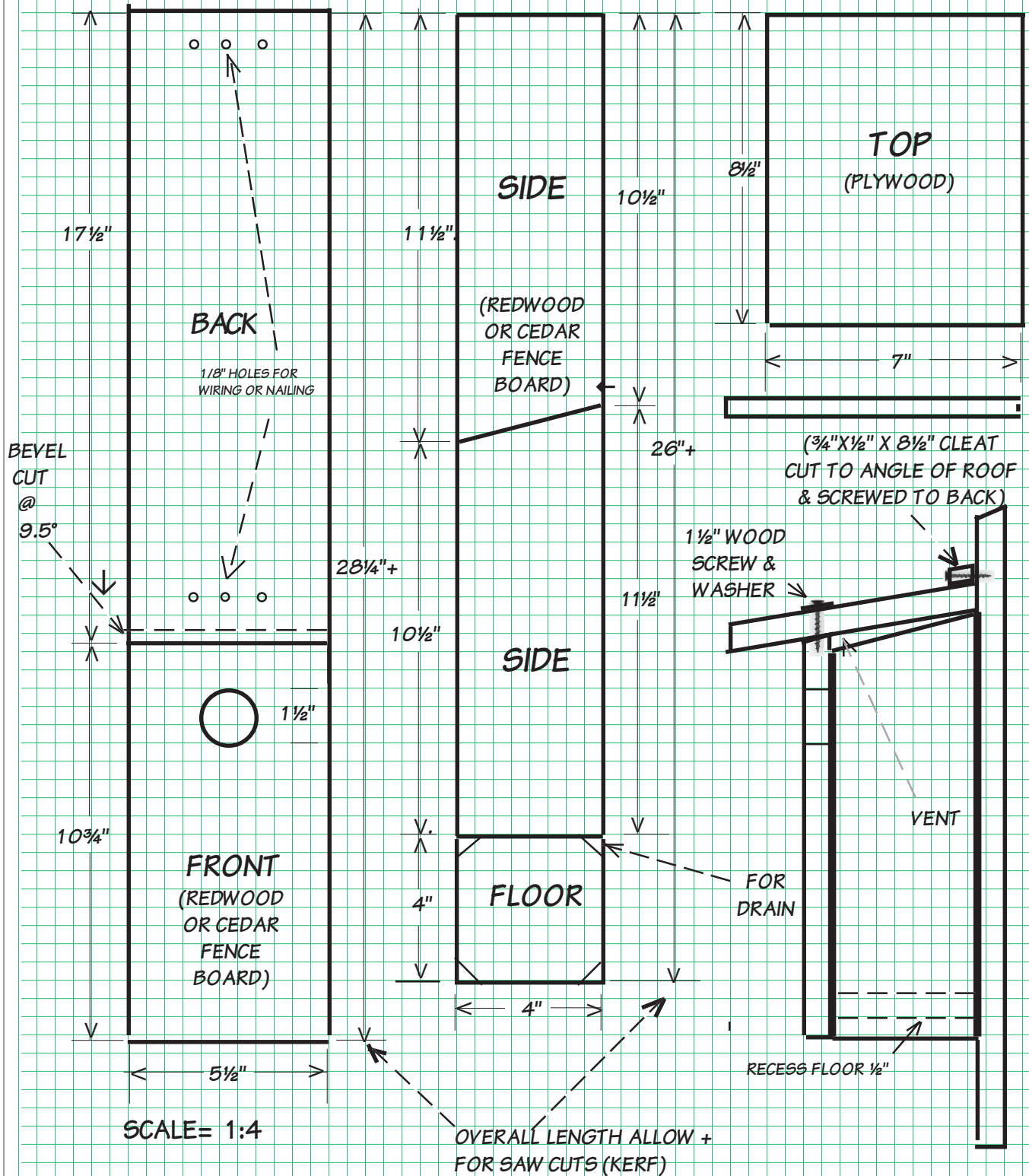
land—up and down the Mississippi, in Texas, wherever there are concentrations of mosquitoes. So far only the Intermountain area and Oregon have escaped. The first human case was recently confirmed in California in August, 2002, in the LA area.

## Birds as carriers

Birds are a major vector of the infection. Dead birds in an area may mean that West Nile virus is circulating between the birds and the mosquitoes in that area. Over 110 species of birds are known to have been infected with West Nile virus. Although birds, particularly crows and jays, infected with WN virus can die or become ill, most infected birds do survive. Hawks and owls have succumbed; cavity nesters infected in the East are Eastern Bluebird, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Martin, Wood Duck,

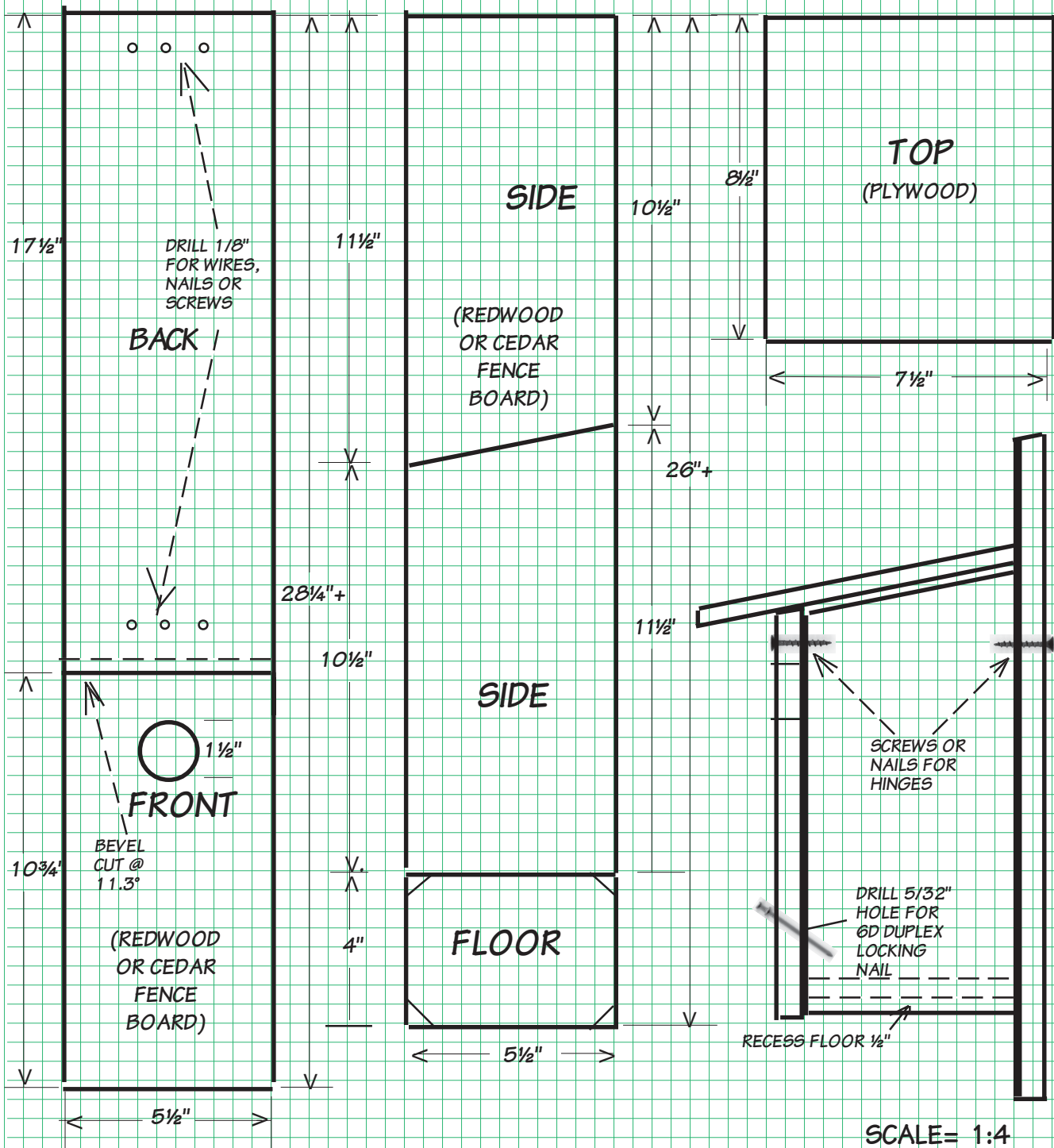


# TOP-OPENING NESTBOX DESIGN



USE 1 1/4" DRYWALL SCREWS; PREDRILL HOLES WITH 3/32" DRILL BIT.  
 FOR MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRDS EXPAND HOLE TO 1 9/16".

## SIDE-OPENING NESTBOX DESIGN



1 1/4" DRYWALL SCREWS; PREDRILL HOLES WITH 3/32" DRILL BIT; ALLOW AT LEAST 1/4" SPACE AT TOP OF BOTH SIDES TO VENT; CUT OFF CORNERS OF FLOOR FOR DRAINAGE; LOCKING NAIL GOES THROUGH FRONT AND INTO SIDE; EITHER SIDE CAN OPEN.

*Need advice? Where should I put my nestbox? What kind of bird builds this nest? What do I do about wasps-ants-earwigs-mites? Mama bird is missing- what do I do now? How do I know they fledged?*

### **CALL YOUR COORDINATOR—KEEP IN TOUCH!**

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>COORDINATOR</u>	<u>STREET</u>	<u>CITY/STATE/ZIP</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>FAX</u>	<u>EMAIL</u>
Alameda	Ann Kositsky	1090 Miller Ave	Berkeley, CA 94708	510-527-5091		ajpa@pacbell.net
Alameda	Raymond A Fontaine	PO Box 92	Livermore, CA 94551	510-447-0213		
Amador	Hatch Graham	PO Box 39	Somerset, CA 95684	530-621-1833	530-621-3939	birdsfly@innercite.com
Butte	Emily Harbison	3536 Butte Campus Dr	Oroville, CA 95965	530-895-2449		deb@cin.butte.cc.ca
Calaveras	La Verne Hagel	466 Thompson Ln	Copperopolis, CA 95228	209-785-2363		
Contra Costa	Shirley&Warren Engstrom	232 Tharp Dr	Moraga, CA 94556	925-376-4695		wiese@juno.com
Contra Costa	Oscar Enstrom	1932 Golden Rain Rd	Walnut Creek, CA 94595	925-952-9261		bigo@lanset.com
El Dorado	Hatch Graham	PO Box 39	Somerset, CA 95684	530-621-1833	530-621-3939	birdsfly@innercite.com
Geotwn Div	Viola Sampert	5655 Hollow Ln	Greenwood, CA 95635	530-333-0318		
Lake	Jeannette Knight	PO Box 152	Cobb, CA 95426	707-928-5250		
Lassen	Edward Bertotti	470 413 Wingfield	Susanville, CA 96130	530-257-3774		
Almanor RD	Terry Nelson	PO Box 767	Chester, CA 96020	530-258-2141		
Lassen NF	Tom Rickman	PO Box 2017	Susanville, CA 96130	530-257-2151		
Los Angeles	Doug Martin	13066 Shenley St	Sylmar, CA 91342	818-367-8967		
Madera	William Rihn	PO Box 1648	Coarsegold, CA 93614	209-683-3052		
Marin	Ruth Beckner	15 Portola Ave	San Rafael, CA 94903	415-479-9542		
Marin	Meryl Sundove	37 Greenwood Beach Rd	Tiburon, CA 94920	415-388-2524	415-388-0717	
Mariposa	Lawrence Punte	9443 Banderillo Dr	La Grange, CA 95329	209-852-2559		
Modoc	Charles Welch	PO Box 825	Alturas, CA 96101	530-233-4534		
Napa	David Graves	1500 Los Cameros Ave	Napa, CA 94559	707-257-0843		
Nevada	Walt Carnahan	12821 Bradford Dr	Grass Valley, CA 95945	530-273-4599		walt@oro.net
Orange	Dick Purvis	936 S Siet Pl	Anaheim, CA 92806	714-776-8878		dickersly@aol.com
Placer	Heath Wakelee	6019 Princeton Reach Wy	Granite Bay, CA 95746	916-797-4538		hwakelee@minolta.com
Plumas (NF)	Patricia Johnson	PO Box 767	Chester, CA 96020	530-258-2141		
Riverside	Melissa Browning	10154 Beaumont Ave	Cherry Valley, CA 92223	909-845-9266		
S Bernardino	Glen Chappell	1923 Abbie Way	Upland, CA 91784	909-981-1996		Chappell@CHS.Chaffey.K12.CA.US
San Diego	Rosemary Fey	PO Box 1245	Borrego Springs, CA 92004	619-767-5810		
San Joaquin	Thomas Hoffman	10122 E Woodbridge Rd	Acampo, CA 95220	209-369-8578		thoffman@lodinet.com
SLuisObispo	Judith Burkhardt	8560 El Corte	Atascadero, CA 93422	805-466-3272		burkhardt@thegrid.net3.
San Mateo	Howard Rathlesberger	230 Ridgeway	Woodside, CA 94062	650-367-1296	650-369-4788	HJRath@aol.com
Sta Barbara	Richard Willey	4172 Vanguard Dr	Lompoc, CA 93436	805-733-5383		willey@utech.net
Santa Clara	David 'Tex' Houston	1099 Fife Ave	Palo Alto, CA 94301	650-326-3402		tex@acterra.org
Santa Cruz	Nanda Currant	530 Amigo Rd	Soquel, CA 95073	408-462-3703		hearth@cruzio.com
Sonoma	Mike Crumly	23555 Hwy 21	Sonoma, CA 95475	707-996-7256		
Sutter	Kevin Putman	2884 Coy Dr	Yuba City, CA 95993	530-755-1480		dputman@syix.com
Tehama	Pete Flower	331 Oak St	Red Bluff, CA 96080	530-527-0392		
Tulare	Peter C Morrison	325 S Willis	Visalia, CA 93291	209-733-1154		
Ventura	Jan Wasserman	1158 Beechwood St	Camarillo, CA 93010	805-987-3928		bandlady@treeswallows.org
Yuba	Kevin Putman	2884 Coy Dr	Yuba City, CA 95993	530-755-1480		dputman@syix.com
All Others	Don Yoder, Program Dir	2021 Ptarmigan Dr #1	Walnut Creek, CA 94595	925-937-5974	925-935-4480	cbrp@value.net

*How will I know if it's the same bird with the 2nd brood? Is that the same pair I had last year? I've had a titmouse in that box for 3 years but how do I know it's the same one?*

### **CONTACT YOUR NEAREST BIRD BANDER. GIVE YOUR BANDER & YOUR BIRDS A RING.**

<u>BANDING AREA</u>	<u>BANDER</u>	<u>PHONE</u>	<u>EMAIL</u>
Amador & Southern El Dorado	Hatch Graham	530-621-1833	birdsfly@innercite.com
Northern El Dorado - Georgetown Divide	Dave Delongchamp	530-333-2304	selkaijen@jps.net
Eastern El Dorado	Susan Yasuda	530-644-2324	syasuda@fs.fed.us
Los Angeles	Walter Sakai	310-434-4702	saikai_walter@smc.edu
Mendocino & Lake Counties	Janet King	707-462-3277	kingfarm@sonic.net
Orange County	Christine Mukai		cmukai@chambersgroupinc.com
Placer & Northern Sacramento	Dee Warenycia	916-786-5056	warbler5@aol.com
Placer & Northern Sacramento	Barry Baba	916-484-3234	bbaba07@earthlink.net
San Francisco Peninsula	Howard Rathlesberg	650-367-1296	HJRath@aol.com
Solano & Yolo Counties	Melanie Truan	530-750-3825	mltruan@ucdavis.edu
Sutter & Yuba Counties	Kevin Putman	530-755-1480	dputman@syix.com
Ventura County	Jan Wasserman	805-987-3928	bandlady@west.net

## RATHLESBERGER WINS 2002 BLUEBIRD AWARD

Howard Rathlesberger, San Mateo County Coordinator, received recognition and was awarded a plaque for his extensive contribution to the field of Bluebird Conservation at the 25th Annual Convention of the **North American Bluebird Society**.

Howard has been very active and effective in recruiting, building interest, and spreading favorable influence among many birders in the West Bay area. Among the sizable crowd at the award ceremony were 14 California birders and families who trekked north of the border for the Silver Anniversary of the Society.

And because time passes before you know it, be aware that the 2003 Annual Convention of the Society is scheduled for Kearney, NE on March 20-23. This meeting is timed to permit viewing of the seasonal migration of Sandhill Cranes—not exactly cavity nesters, but a part of the great outdoors.

## Aggressive bluebirds

During 6 years of monitoring WEBLS, I have noticed wide variances in their behavior as I near nestboxes with my Purvis-lifter and pole in hand. Some are quite passive as I approach and they perch quietly on a nearby branch.

However, this is in great contrast to others who swoop at me from as far away as 75 feet and continue to swarm around their nestbox and me as I take it down, look inside, and replace it.

Even at this point they are not satisfied as they continue to hover over my head as I walk quickly away, sometimes following me for another 75 yards. They are so close overhead that I can feel the air from their beating wings on the top of my head.

This aggressive behavior happens every year I approach this particular nestbox. These are either returning adults or their offspring whom they have trained well.

~Bob Franz

## The Poet's Corner

### TRICKSTER

Atop the winter-topped oak  
a plain brown wren  
flicks her tail and  
sings her bubble-song;  
you'd think she's got a cozy,  
twig-filled den  
atop the winter-topped oak.

A plain brown wren  
could hatch her eggs  
inside my nestbox – then  
feign a stick-nest here,  
to lead me wrong.

Atop the winter-topped oak  
a plain brown wren  
flicks her tail and  
sings her bubble-song.

Taylor Graham

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BLUEBIRDS FLY!  
California Bluebird Recovery Program's  
Newsletter  
Vol 8, No. 1 & 2, Spring-Summer, 2002

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