

The Western Bluebird Survival Guide

A Guide to understanding and helping the western bluebird thrive again in our fields and backyards.



WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF BLUEBIRDS!

Numbers of bluebirds and their habitat have declined over past years to the degree that they are considered a sensitive species by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. To help conservation efforts, you can provide homes for these cavity-nesting birds; the nest box you put up today can make a difference in helping bluebirds thrive in the future.

FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT WESTERN BLUEBIRDS

A member of the thrush family and slightly smaller than the American robin, the male western bluebird has a rust color across the shoulders and breast, a grayish-white belly, and vivid blue head, back, wings and tail. The female plumage is pale compared to the male; her head, back, wings and tail are blue gray.



Bluebirds prefer open, unforested habitat where abundant food and perches are found. Their diet consists of spiders, grasshoppers and other invertebrates, and they like perches such as posts, poles, snags or shrubs from which to hunt. They do not nest in forests, sterile fields, or areas of heavy brush or ground cover.

Nesting season begins between mid-March and mid-April, when bluebirds pairs begin inspecting nest boxes. The male, territorial and defensive, guards his mate, while she constructs a nest of fine dry grasses, occasionally tucking a small blue or dark feather into the side. Normally 4 to 6 pale blue eggs are laid at one-day intervals. Incubation, usually solely by the female, begins after the last egg is laid. Eggs take 13 to 14 days to hatch; then the female broods the naked young until they develop feathers about 10 days later. Both adults feed their nestlings a diet of different insects before the young leave the nest when they are 19 to 22 days old. The parents continue caring for the fledglings until they become adept at hunting. Depending on weather and food supply, western bluebirds may re-nest a second time in one year, and on rare occasions a third time.

CHOOSING A NEST BOX SITE

Choose a sunny, open meadow or field (clearcut areas included) with short grasses and nearby perches. Place the box approximately five feet from the ground on a post, pole, side of a building, or single-standing tree. A water source or birdbath nearby is an incentive for bluebirds to use a box. Face the box away from prevailing winds, which usually come from the southwest. Do not allow tall grass, shrubs or vines to grow beneath the box because predators such as house cats, snakes and raccoons may hide there.

Place the nest box where pesticides will not be used. Herbicides and fungicides may reduce the amount of food available.

Place bluebird boxes more than 100 yards apart.

Too many closely spaced boxes may cause frustration in bluebirds unless a visual barrier separates the territories, and may bring about excessive competition for boxes from other species such as tree and violet-green swallows, house wrens, chickadees, house sparrows, and starlings. House sparrows and starlings are not native species; nests of these species should be destroyed because of the negative impacts on native species such as bluebirds.

After every fledging, the old nest should be removed, the box scraped clean, and the drain holes opened. In the fall, boxes should be repaired and the large ventilation spaces closed with felt weather strip so bluebirds can use them for roosting during the winter.

More Information

If you wish to learn more about the western bluebird or would like to set up a bluebird trail, contact the [North American Bluebird Society](#), Box 6295, Silver Spring, MD 20906-0295, or contact a local birding group.

