

\$2.50 per issue  
suggested donation

# BLUEBIRDS FLY!

California Bluebird Recovery Program's *newsletter*

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

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

## 2005 Annual Report — Hatch Graham

# California topped 18,000 last year; 19 species reported by 148 monitors in 25 counties

Steve Simmons is top producer for 2005.

Orange County leads in fledglings and nestboxes.

Fledglings per box indicates efficiency in nestbox location.

With 3,828 cavity nesters reported, Merced bird bander and Barn Owl promoter **Steve Simmons** surpassed our perennial producer **Dick Purvis** who always leads the pack with Western Bluebirds. Dick reported 1,706 birds in 3 southern counties.

They were followed by the Tree Swallow lady, **Jan Wasserman** who accounted for 872 new swallows in Ventura County.

The only monitor in Alameda County, **Irv Tiessen**, reported on 7 species for a total of 832 fledglings.

Another Orange County producer like Purvis was **Bob Franz** who accounted for 704 — mostly WEBLs.

**Dr. Melanie Truan**, at UC Davis, reported 657 fledglings which included a 4th brood by one bluebird pair who continued to try after losing eggs to rat predation, and many House Wrens who produced second broods.

With 1,160 nestboxes and 4,763 new birds, little Orange County once more is the top cavity nesting county and surely produces the most Western Bluebirds. This remarkable feat is primarily because of the nearly vandal-free hanging boxes placed in parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and urban gardens. Very few of their locations could be considered native habitat but, rather, man-made habitat that would never see a bluebird except for the artificial cavities provided by dedicated bluebirders.

Top ten counties in fledglings were:

Orange - 4763; Merced - 3828; Santa Clara - 1930; Nevada - 1012; San Mateo - 967; Ventura - 886; Alameda - 832; Yolo/Solano - 657; Amador - 630; Los Angeles - 530.

Counties with the most boxes were:

Orange - 1160; Merced - 1003; Ventura - 745; San Mateo - 562; Santa Clara - 552; Nevada - 295; Alameda - 219; Mendocino - 218; Contra Costa - 171; and Yolo/ Solano - 170

There are a number of reasons for inefficiency in nestbox location. Some research projects (such as UC Davis's Putah Creek study, and the Mendocino study at UC's Hopland Research Station) need to saturate an area to ensure no cavity-nester lacks a home. But many savvy monitors move nestboxes that are not attracting birds.

Some monitors with only a box or two can record large fledgling per box scores because their few boxes are not enough to satisfy the need in their area. A case in point is **Colin Campbell's** top listing in San Bernardino County. His one box with 2 broods of WEBLs for 14 fledgling per box gives him the lead over all others.



Perhaps more important is the expertise of **Susan Bulger**, **David De Ment**, and **Dick Purvis** whose 530 boxes in LA averaged 5.76 baby birds per box.

*(continued on page 3)*

## NABS Convention 2006

April 26 - 30

San Antonio Texas

If you're looking for an inspirational getaway, there's still time to register!

This promises to be a wonderful, Texas-sized event in beautiful San Antonio. Get all the intriguing details, as well as features about additional tourist treats in the area

by logging on to:

[www.nabs2006.com](http://www.nabs2006.com)

or write to:

NABS 2006 Registration

P.O. Box 131161

The Woodlands, TX 77393-1161



## Avian Flu Alert

In order to advise and alert any birder who has not already heard or read current warnings about Avian Flu virus and its frightening potential, we would be remiss if we did not also include warnings to CBRP members and subscribers. We urge every monitor to be alert to daily news reports which of course can be far more up to date than any we can carry in these pages. We believe the risk of its spreading to domestic birds is serious, as is the risk of potential transmittal to humans. Health authorities tell us it is bound to happen; the question is *when?*

## *A Note from the Program Director*

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

Confronting us immediately is the need to complete the counts of nests, eggs and fledges, and send the written reports off to be recorded and published.

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

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

## California Bluebird Recovery Program

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

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

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

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

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

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

## California Bluebird Recovery Program

Don Yoder

Program Director

2021 Ptarmigan Dr. #1  
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

(925) 937-5974 vox

(925) 935-4480 fax

[cbrp@value.net](mailto:cbrp@value.net)

BLUEBIRDS FLY!

Patsy Kahl

Editor

[kahl@woodsideca.com](mailto:kahl@woodsideca.com)

Annual Report Results

(continued from page 1)

NOTES ON ANNUAL REPORT

The five monitors in Amador County — **Doris & Bill Allison, Hatch & Judy Graham, Chuck & Karin Lowrie, Dianne McCleery,** and **Rachel Talbot** with 132 boxes averaged 4.77 per box.

Other counties with creditable fledgling per box averages were Sonoma - 4.50; Santa Barbara - 4.47; Riverside - 4.43; Orange - 4.11; Yolo/Solano - 3.86; Merced - 3.82; and Alameda - 3.80.

As usual, there are many nestbox landlords who no longer report to us. We are pleased that our efforts got them started but we are disappointed that our reporting procedures have apparently discouraged some from sending us their yearly results.

We miss our Forest Service coordinators in the northern counties but recognize their current budgets make monitoring and reporting difficult.

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

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

There are exceptions to 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 on the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) have a unique four-letter Alpha Code which is easier to remember than the AOU numbers (and less confusing than bb for bluebird or chc for chickadee which could be any of 3 species).

We urge all birders to use the professionals' alpha codes when reporting.

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

**ACWO = Acorn Woodpecker**

**AMKE = American Kestrel**

**ATFL = Ash-throated Flycatcher**

**BEWR = Bewick's Wren**

**BLPH = Black Phoebe**

**BNOW = Barn Owl**

**CBCH = Chestnut-backed Chickadee**

**EUST = European Starling**

**HOFI = House Finch**

**HOSP = House Sparrow**

**HOWR = House Wren**

**MOBL = Mountain Bluebird**

**MOCH = Mountain Chickadee**

**NUWO = Nuttall's Woodpecker**

**OATI = Oak Titmouse**

**PYNU = Pygmy Nuthatch**

**RBNU = Red-breasted Nuthatch**

**TRES = Tree Swallow**

**VGSW = Violet-green Swallow**

**WBNU = White-breasted Nuthatch**

**WEBL = Western Bluebird**

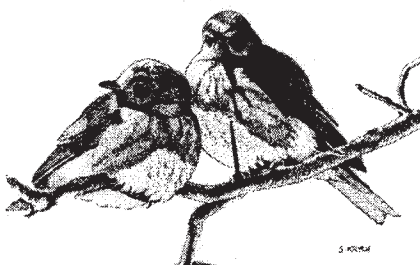
**WESO = Western Screech Owl**

**WODU = Wood Duck**

**CBRP PROGRAM TEN-YEAR TOTALS**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>Counties</b>	21	31	33	37	33	26	28	30	25	25
<b>Reporters</b>	169	293	326	264	178	175	193	163	176	148
<b>Species</b>	16	17	16	20	20	18	18	18	18	19
<b>Boxes (N)</b>	2400	3642	4142	4596	4167	4209	4027	4055	4129	5139
<b>Triles (T)</b>	1526	2442	3214	3527	3783	4023	3937	3514	4026	4177
<b>T/N</b>	64%	67%	78%	77%	91%	96%	98%	87%	98%	81%
<b>Eggs (E)</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20315	23470	23981	17816	19109	22879
<b>E/N</b>	-	-	-	-	5.5	5.6	5.9	4.4	4.6	4.5
<b>E/T</b>	-	-	-	-	6.1	5.8	6.1	5.1	4.7	4.5
<b>Chicks (H)</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17204	18501	19250	14429	15500	17888
<b>H/N</b>	-	-	-	-	4.1	4.4	4.8	3.6	3.8	3.5
<b>H/T</b>	-	-	-	-	4.5	4.6	4.9	4.1	3.8	4.3
<b>H/E</b>	-	-	-	-	75%	79%	80%	81%	81%	78%
<b>Fledged (F)</b>	5077	8393	11326	13122	15703	17399	16201	12720	13700	18414
<b>F/N</b>	2.1	2.3	2.7	2.9	3.8	4.1	4.0	3.1	3.3	3.6
<b>F/T</b>	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.7	4.2	4.3	4.1	3.6	3.4	*
<b>F/E</b>	-	-	-	-	68%	72%	68%	71%	72%	*
<b>F/H</b>	-	-	-	-	91%	92%	84%	88%	88%	*

\*No data on T,E, H from Ventura or Merced Cos.in 2005





# Is the Western Bluebird Population Coming Back?

A Discussion with Cornell's Dr. Janis L. Dickinson by Georgette A. Howington

Obsessed about finding research that would reassure me that the western bluebird population is no longer in decline, I perused the internet into the wee hours of the night. For hours. Not to mention searching the many other resources in the local college library, such as nature magazines, trade journals and scientific reports weeks before. I found a lot of ambiguous information, outdated research and many opinions based on personal experience by bluebirders.

Fortunately, I stumbled across an article written by Dr. Janis L. Dickinson, Associate Professor of Natural Sciences at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and emailed her my question. Here is her response:

"For now, the possibility that western bluebirds are declining in California is something that needs to be examined in more detail. A paper by Sauer et al (1997) suggested declines based upon the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data and the BBS trend maps for 1996-2003 show large areas of declines in California, Arizona, and New Mexico, but it is difficult for me to assess the extent to which these trends are statistically significant without working with the data. A GAP analysis in Southern California listed bluebirds as a species of concern (Stoms & Davis 1994 – <http://biology.usgs.gov/s+†/noframe/m3281.htm>): According to the Birds of North America account (Guinan et al. 2000), our western bluebirds were listed as

sensitive in Oregon and Utah; proposed as a candidate for listing in Washington (Atwood 1994), listed as a species of high concern by New Mexico Partners in Flight (Hall et al. 1997), considered "in jeopardy" in California by Erlich et al. (1992), and proposed for designation as a species of "special concern" in British Columbia (Weber 1980).

My take on all this is that of course we should be worried, because we know western bluebirds are dependent on oak mistletoe in California. The deciduous oaks on which mistletoe grows are not regenerating well and we also have huge problems with clearing of oak woodland, which has been exacerbated by the wine rush (we finally have an Oak Woodlands Conservation bill SB1344 signed in Fall 2004, but this does not apply to agricultural uses). What we really need are habitat-specific measures of survival and reproductive success of color-banded adults and nestlings and I am hoping to receive a USDA grant to do this project and to involve citizen scientists in a broad scale monitoring that would project bluebird survival as a function of oak woodland availability and answer the question of whether putting nest boxes out in vineyards is a good thing.

At Cornell, we are creating a new data entry system for The Birdhouse Network this spring and it should be pilot tested by the end of the summer and online by 2007. To address issues of WEBL declines we need more detailed data than are currently collected

for most bluebird trails. Our new data entry will cover all nesting birds, but will be pilot tested on The Birdhouse Network (TBN). We also have a nice nationwide 'Personality Profiles' experiment coming on board this spring. *We would love to have the California Bluebird Recovery folks participate!* Getting the Californians on board with this more detailed data collection could be achieved by having individual members join TBN or by having our data entry scheme 'cloned' for the CBRP, but this second route actually costs a fair amount of money. In any case, I think that detailed data on each nest is what will be required to track bluebird population trends and the more data the better. Ultimately, I hope to get Californians more involved in banding as well as it is winter survival which will be most affected by mistletoe removal. My goal is to follow up on the data provided by bluebirders in California and use them to track impacts of vineyards and clearing of oak woodland.

I hope this is of some help. We would love to have you and your friends join The Birdhouse Network as we are in great need of more western participants to really get a handle on patterns of reproductive success in western bluebirds. What's really nice is that the data will be used by scientists and will be stored for posterity to follow trends long into the future.

Check us out!

[www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse)"

*Don Yoder's*

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD...

When last we met here the printing deadline prevented our reporting some Field Notes that had arrived from a good many hard working monitors. In order to hear from all those that space will permit, the following will still try to catch up as we start the new season.

**Florence Tanner**, El Dorado, gets her ration of blue feathered friends from Stellar's Jays that visit her area in profusion -- but bluebirds have never ventured or stayed in the same area. And the Jays don't adapt to her nestboxes of usual design.

And Jays (variety not reported) are suspected of extracting five WEBL hatchlings from a nestbox offered by **Chuck and Karin Lowrie**, Amador, but two broods of Oak Titmouses fared much better and nine youngsters were believed to have fledged to swell the population.

It's a god idea to have an adequate number of boxes available and in place -- ahead of the demand. **Nancy Hobert**, Contra Costa, offers seven nestboxes: two were never used; early titmouses occupied one and were followed by bluebirds, but we don't know if the other four boxes were used at all.

Many birders encounter weather conditions that can be very influential on the results they attain on the bottom line at the end of the season. **Ray DiBasilio**, El Dorado, along with several others, was hit by two cold, wet storms in May and

June. Three clutches of WEBL were unable to cope with the severe conditions and were lost.

In different but unusual conditions in a high desert area at nearly the opposite end of the state, **Richard Kempton**, Ventura, expecting 4-5 inches of rain, in '05 received 21 inches, warm weather and plenty of insects: "...yielded the best results I've had since starting my record keeping in 1996".

**Walt Carnahan**, Nevada, reports on 290 nestboxes cared for by 30 Monitors. WEBLs were able to nest with reasonable success but hatching and fledging were less satisfactory. The altitude of part of the boxes attracted MOBL who found nesting to be difficult but beyond that point were adept at getting the youngsters on their way.

**Andy and Kathy Aldrich**, Tuolumne, suffered nestbox losses by the masked bandits (raccoons) in '04 but gained an upper hand in '05 by attaching 24" metal flashing to the oaks and posts on which nestboxes are hung. (Such protective coverings often attract sizable numbers of earwigs under the flashing; we would be interested in learning whether these insects will migrate to the nestbox interiors? Earwigs are primarily vegetarians and do not cause problems for bluebirds, and who will practically pick them up at your feet when the box is cleaned. P.D.)

**Sabrina Dussau**, forwarding reports by **Ray Abeyta** and **Cisco Schaaf**, Contra Costa, modified Peterson-type nestboxes by the attachment of a double roof to reduce mortalities from heat exhaustion. Unfortunately, such efforts did not help production in the two boxes that were stolen.

**Georgette Howington**, Contra Costa, had nestings delayed by heavy rain, and lost several nests to the excessive cold weather, both empty/abandoned and with hatchlings.

Following two years of no nests in their nestboxes, **Paul and Dianna Brink**, El Dorado, are happy to announce fledglings in all 3 of their nestboxes! (That's enough to produce that satisfied look on their faces! Finally, the birds did it right P.D.)

**Irv Tiessen**, Alameda, maintained 219 nestboxes in the reporting year, located on 11 properties in an area of roughly 16 square miles, belonging variously, to San Francisco Water District and the East Bay Regional Park District and other interests. Fledging of WEBLs dropped by 26% but a final figure of 270 emerged. Irv attributes that drop largely to weather conditions that chilled out the blues but possibly increased Tree Swallows which will compete with bluebirds under some conditions. Obviously, in a study area of this size, many elements influence the final figures and individual trails experience varying trends and results. The detailed figures that Irv has established will enable tracking of these trails over an extended period of time.

(cont. next col.)

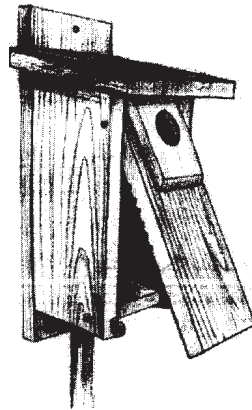
Susan Bejsovec, El Dorado, got a fast nesting turnaround by a second brood of blues – first brood fledged June 6. Box was cleaned on June 16 and the following day rebuilding began, with resulting 5 eggs all fledged successfully. To quote Susan, "Remember to clean out those boxes."



Annual variations in nesting practices by bird species may occur without explanation by the birds. In El Dorado, Enid Reeves knew that an initial brood of 3 bluebirds fledged but the parents died shortly after the kids fledged. A second brood was successful, and her first ever third brood appeared on the scene. Strangely, none of the other little species that have used available nestboxes in past years showed up in '05.

## Richard Willey's Field Notes...

From Santa Barbara County, Richard reports that his Sanford Vineyard trail was once again a hotbed of activity. The winery was featured in the movie *Sideways* and this has nearly doubled the number of visitors to the winery. But that traffic didn't seem to bother the birds. Richard Sanford prides himself on all-organic farming for his grapes and this makes for seemingly ideal habitat with no harmful pesticides for the 28 nestboxes on his property. The 28 boxes fledged 179 bluebirds this year! There was also a first when one box had 8 eggs, 7 of which hatched and fledged. That box also had a second brood of 6 and a third brood of 5, all of which fledged. That's 18 bluebirds from one box!



## Sharing Good Ideas

Bluebirders seem ever willing and anxious to exchange and share information and suggestions relating to problems at any opportunity. A current example of such cooperation is to be found in *Bluebird Trails and Tales*, newsletter of Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania, Volume 8, Issue 2, Summer 2005. A full page, illustrating and describing the hanging nestbox and lifter of Dick Purvis should help solve a goodly number of frustrating problems for the Easterners...just as we find on California trails.

## Howard Rathlesberger Reports

San Mateo County Coordinator

Thanks to the monitors' efforts and persistence, the 2005 annual state report is complete and forwarded to Hatch Graham. The totals continue to increase.

The WEBL totals are higher than 2004's by 6 with total starts higher by 42 - 241 vs. 289. The blues still top the number of boxes active from 415-442.

17 boxes of **Claude Reichard's** 280 East trail were not counted due to a problem with Caltrans, but we believe that will be corrected in time for the '06 season.

The golf courses, Menlo Country Club and Sharon Heights, are the real producers thanks to **Pat Watters** and **Robin Smith**. Their yield is steady and increasing. I believe it's due to the fact that their environments are stabilized due to their irrigation and closely cropped fairways. The conditions are very steady regardless of the weather. The number of chicks fledged **increases**, but the blues continue to be most prominent. Menlo has 30 boxes, with 46 WEBLs fledged and 117 chicks fledging for all species. Sharon Heights has 28 boxes with 45 WEBLs fledged and 90 chicks of all species fledging.

A new entry this year is recognition of the Tree Swallow (TRES). Please study the differences so we can properly identify them in 2006.

The next issue of Filoli Highlights will include color photos. We'll be sure to have some of **Max Grandfield's** brilliant WEBLs included.

Keep your eyes open for VGSW vs. TRES. The Ash Throated Flycatchers are nesting. **Cindy Lockhart** has one on the lower Windy Hill trail. She also reported having the pleasure of watching a Wild Turkey with 5-6 poults (chicks) walk by.

The **Williams** have a family with 4 chicks. We banded them earlier and now they come for a tasty meal of mealworms daily. **Dawn Williams** spied a Nuttall's Woodpecker feeding a Downey Woodpecker chick. She's checking carefully and getting photographic proof!



## Books for Monitors

For some time we have been able to secure copies of *Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide* by Myrna Pearman, in lieu of the Monitoring Guide written by our Hatch Graham and which is now out of print. *The Mountain Guide* is an excellent reference book, has just been reprinted, and provides details mirroring every aspect of our Western Bluebirds. We plan to have copies of the new edition shortly, and wouldn't you know it?...paper, postage and printing are up...but we intend to hold the same price as we've had heretofore. *The Guide* is very informative and useful for your reference and makes a wonderful gift.



## Spring Birders' Review

As you read this Springtime edition your nestbox tenants will be building, laying, hatching, and fledging very soon. And isn't it always the case that those who get to the boxes first can be first to raise the earliest families? But it doesn't always follow our intended pattern that the blues should be our first tenants of the season. Most often the Oak Titmouse nests are the earliest to appear. And they will let you know by their responses if they feel you are intruding on their privacy while they are brooding.

Because we provide artificial cavities intended for bluebirds, we cannot overlook the acknowledged fact that other varieties are also in need of similar help; they welcome some of the same protection from the elements and

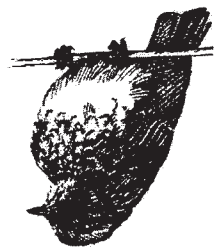
the place to put some eggs when they get the urge. Having injected our own efforts into the welfare of the blues, we also owe the same care and attention to other varieties who find those cavities useful. We too often overlook the fact that there are certain laws and regulations that govern our actions when we participate in such activities. You should know that both State and Federal regulations apply to every nestbox on your trail.

We must recognize that a variety of State or Federal *Do's* and *Don'ts* – mostly *Don'ts* – govern our activities and treatment of any native migratory bird or animal. The main intent of such provisions is to avoid any interference or disturbance of such wildlife. Only if the monitor possesses a permit for certain activities may a broader scope of contact be undertaken.

Without a permit you *may* open the nestbox for the purpose of inspection or counting eggs or young. You *May Not* remove an occupied wet nest for the purpose of substituting dry material if it involves handling eggs or chicks to do so. And if a different variety of tenant has built a nest ahead of your intended bluebird occupant, you *May Not* remove the nest of the first tenant in order to accommodate the ex-communicated bluebird. Such infractions and others can lead to substantial fines and penalties. (Our State and Federal Fish and Game Departments are the source and interpreters of such regulations. Local offices can be of help with respect to each code. See page 7 in this Newsletter for a separate description of a Monitoring Guide which deals at length with the details of these rules.)

*Program Director*

\*\*\*\*\*  
 HATCH & JUDY GRAHAM  
 CALIF BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROGRAM  
 PO BOX 39  
 SOMERSET CA 95684-0039



Vol 12, No. 1 Spring 2006  
 Newsletter  
 California Bluebird Recovery Program's

## BLUEBIRDS FLY!

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

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

Nonprofit Org.  
 U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
 Concord, CA  
 Permit 66