

Local Nestbox Users | Western Bluebird

IDENTIFICATION



Photo: J Daly, GOERTS

Male

- Bright blue wings, head, and throat
- Brown patch (cape) on back
- Orange-red breast and sides
- Grey belly and under-tail coverts
- 6.5 - 7 inches long



Photo: J Daly, GOERTS

Female

- Pale blue wings, tail, and throat
- Grey crown and back
- White eye-ring
- Grey belly and under-tail coverts
- Brown wash on breast and sides
- 5.5 - 6.5 inches long

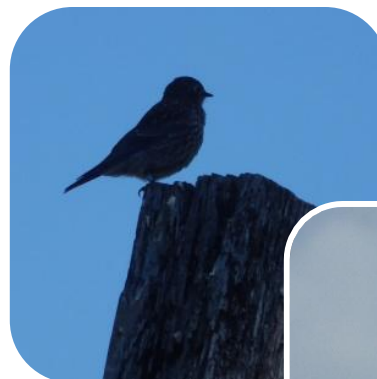


Photo: Bill Pennell

Juvenile

- Grey-blue head and blue flight feathers
- Brown breast spotted with white
- White eye-ring

Western Bluebirds resemble a small American Robin in shape. They have slender bills and perch with an upright posture (below left), though they can also appear quite round when hunched down on their feet (below right).





BEHAVIOUR

The bluebird's song is a series of soft "pew" calls, though they will make a rapid chattering noise if their nest is approached.

Bluebirds spend much of their time hunting for ground-dwelling insects such as crickets and caterpillars. They do this by perching on a low fence or branch and then flying directly to the insect before returning to their perch. This hunting style, called "ground-sallying," is a characteristic flight pattern for Western Bluebirds.

Bluebirds often have a slow and direct flying style, which distinguishes them from similar birds, such as swallows, which fly swiftly and acrobatically.

In BC, Western Bluebirds return from their southern US wintering grounds in late February or March to prospect for good nesting areas. Males arrive first to stake out a territory, singing from exposed perches to attract a mate. Bluebirds begin to migrate south again in October.

HABITAT

Western Bluebirds typically settle in open fields and meadows with a few large Garry Oak trees. They prefer habitat with short grass as it is easier for them to spot their insect prey. Western Bluebirds are often found perched on low branches, fencelines, and even on telephone or hydro wires.

NESTING

Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters, meaning they cannot excavate their own nesting cavities, but must use old woodpecker cavities, natural holes in trees, or nestboxes for nesting. Nestbox programs are a very successful way to help rebuild Western Bluebird populations.

Bluebirds begin breeding in late March and early April. Females lay 4-7 pale blue to white eggs in tidy nests built of dry grass. Chicks hatch after two weeks of incubation and the parents feed them insects. Chicks spend another 19-22 days in the nest until they fledge. Once the young fledge, the male continues to feed them while the female may raise a second brood.

Nesting pairs maintain a small territory, which they share with their own offspring for the season. Pairs will return to established territories year after year.



Photo: J Daly, GOERTS



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Use this key to help distinguish Western Bluebirds from other local birds that are blue:

1. Dark blue or indigo above; long wings extend past body when perched: **Swallow**
2. Small and squat, with short legs; long white stripe above eye: **Red-breasted Nuthatch**
3. Thick, black bill; 2 white bars on each wing: **Lazuli Bunting**

Learn more about Western Bluebirds, see photos, hear their calls, and more at Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds (www.allaboutbirds.org/guide).