

Tips for identifying Western Bluebirds



Photo by Tom Grey: www.pbase.com/tgrey

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 to 7 inches long



Photo from www.birdphotography.com

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 to 6.5 inches long

Juveniles have spotted bellies and an eye-ring similar to females

Western Bluebirds are bright, energetic songbirds, smaller than an American Robin. They eat winter berries and insects, actively hunting their insect prey from perches on fences, shrubs, and low branches. They prefer large, open grasslands and meadows.

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

Nesting pairs maintain a small territory, which they share with their own offspring for the season. The birds will return to established territories year after year. They will successfully share territory with swallows, but House Wrens and House Sparrows will drive them out or even kill them.

Life History

Western Bluebirds return from their southern wintering grounds in late February or March, to prospect for good nesting areas. Males arrive first to stake out a territory, singing on exposed perches and performing aerial displays around the nest cavity. Birds start breeding in late March or early April. Nests are built mostly from grass, and females lay 4-6 pale blue to white eggs. 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 feeds them and the female may raise another brood.

For more information visit www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/western_bluebird/lifehistory or see the GOERT species at risk field manual at www.goert.ca/documents/SARFS_sialmexi.pdf.