



Photo by Dawn Fizzard 2011

Nestbox Host Frequently Asked Questions:

Bring Back the Bluebirds Project

General:

Why should I help?

Rare plants and animals need safe places to grow. **Nestbox programs work!** Hosting nestboxes for Western Bluebirds is a simple way to support the return of a healthy breeding population. These native songbirds eat a lot of insects and are an important part of Garry Oak meadow and woodland ecosystems, and a lost part of our natural heritage. You can help us recover these missing components of our landscape.

Who is in charge of the program?

Since 2004, the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT) has been placing nestboxes to support the return of a Western Bluebird population. We are also fundraising for a re-introduction program. With the Salt Spring Island Conservancy and other partners, we plan to re-introduce breeding pairs into suitable habitat; this follows on the early successes of a 5 year re-introduction project on nearby San Juan Island.

Is my property suitable habitat for Western Bluebirds?

The best sites are rural open meadows with fences and shrubs or scattered Garry Oaks for hunting perches. If you have House Sparrows and outdoor cats, your property may not be suitable. Please see www.goert.ca/bluebird for **pictures of good bluebird habitat** and other information.

How many boxes will I have/where should they go?

Most properties will support 4 to 8 boxes. Please see our "Nestbox Placement" info sheet for details.

Risks and concerns:

Will it cost me anything?

There is **no financial cost** to you (although donations are always gratefully received).

Will I need to change my activities on my land?

No. Agricultural and other land use practices will not disturb the bluebirds when their boxes are well placed. You may want to discourage House Sparrows by discontinuing seed-feeding.

Will the locations of the nests be made public?

Your address and personal information will not be made public without your consent. We may create regional maps showing general nestbox locations for research and educational purposes.

Do I have to let strangers onto my property? How often?

GOERT staff or volunteers will meet with you to mount the nestboxes. We hope you'll choose to monitor them yourself (6-8 times a year), in which case we will only come if you need us; otherwise, we can arrange for a trained Steward to monitor the boxes on your property. If bluebirds nest, things

get pretty exciting! A GOERT expert will visit your site and you can decide if you want help with the weekly monitoring of a bluebird family, or have a Steward come to track their progress. As with any activity involving visitors to your property, we recommend that you have proper liability insurance in place before volunteers begin monitoring your nestboxes.

Roles and responsibilities:

Who puts up the nestboxes?

GOERT staff or expert volunteers will meet with you to mount the nestboxes in the best locations. We will number them and take note of their location for research purposes.

Who looks after the boxes?

We hope you'll choose to monitor them for activity (6-8 times a year) between March and September. The boxes need to be cleaned out every fall to eliminate insect infestations and prepare for the next nesting season. Please see "Basic Monitoring" for detailed information. If you cannot monitor the boxes but would still like to host them, we may be able to match you with a volunteer Steward who will record activity. GOERT will repair or replace damaged boxes: please contact us.

What do I do if birds are using the nestboxes?

Observe and record the species: see the "Basic Monitoring" package for more information. **If you observe Western Bluebirds or invasive House Sparrows, please contact us right away.**

What do I do if I see a Western Bluebird?

CALL US! Celebrate! Cheer! Have a party!

What if I want to discontinue hosting nestboxes?

If you need to change our agreement for any reason, please contact us. For the sake of the birds that may be using the boxes, we will remove them after August. Once bluebirds have established a territory they will use it year after year. If you doubt your ability to host nestboxes over the long term, please consider supporting the Bring Back the Bluebirds project in another way.

Who do I contact for help, more information, or to report data?

Visit www.goert.ca/bluebird for:

- ▶ Pictures of bluebirds and good nesting habitat
- ▶ Identification key for species and their nests
- ▶ Information sheets and monitoring packages
- ▶ Blank nestbox monitoring forms
- ▶ Western Bluebird vocal tracks
- ▶ And more!

Email bluebird@goert.ca or FAX: 250-590-3410:

- ▶ To report your monitoring data
- ▶ To send photos
- ▶ With requests for clarification or general information

If you've seen a Western Bluebird, have decided to host nestboxes, or have House Sparrows in your nestboxes, call us at 250-383-3427.