



Bring Back the Western Bluebird

The Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team and our partners are working to restore a healthy breeding population of Western Bluebirds to our islands

Bring Back the Bluebirds is a joint project of the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT), American Bird Conservancy, Cowichan Valley Naturalists, Ecostudies Institute, Nature Conservancy of Canada, North American Bluebird Society, Province of BC, Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Salt Spring Island Conservancy, San Juan Preservation Trust, and the Victoria Natural History Society.



Photo by William F. Walker wfwalkerphoto.com

We thank our funders for the first year of the project: North American Bluebird Society, Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society, Victoria Natural History Society, and private donors.

Special thanks to Fort Lewis-McChord Military Reserve (Jim Lynch) and Dr. Karen Wolf of Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium.

Working together, through voluntary stewardship, land conservation, and targeted restoration activities, we hope to re-establish a breeding population of Western Bluebirds on southeastern Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands (the “Salish Sea” area).

Once common throughout the Salish Sea area, this Western Bluebird population is now red-listed*and considered extirpated (locally extinct) in BC.

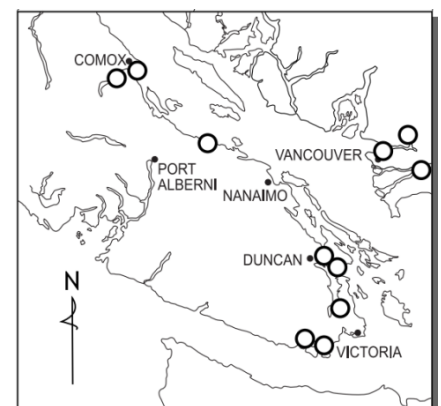
As recently as 60 years ago, Western Bluebirds were common on southern Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands. By 1995, Western Bluebirds were no longer breeding in southwestern BC and were rarely seen. Their rapid decline both here and in nearby areas of Washington and Oregon was probably due to a combination of loss of Garry Oak habitat, removal of the standing dead trees that provided cavities for nesting, reduction of insect prey due to pesticide use, and competition for nest holes with exotic bird species such as House Sparrows.

Our goal is to restore this missing piece of our endangered Garry Oak ecosystems

Today, Western Bluebirds are recovering throughout Washington and parts of Oregon. GOERT is leading conservation efforts to bring back the bluebirds to British Columbia.

We are helping bluebirds in two ways:

- supplying nesting cavities in safe foraging and breeding habitat by mounting nestboxes
- re-introducing bluebirds to recreate healthy breeding populations



○ former breeding sites

Building a Regional Western Bluebird Population

For the past 5 years, the San Juan Islands Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project has used a combination of importing birds from a healthy population at Fort Lewis-McChord Military Reserve, and ensuring that there are abundant nestboxes for them in good habitat, to re-introduce Western Bluebirds to the San Juan Islands where they had been extirpated since the 1930s.

Many of these translocated bluebirds have successfully nested, some of them raising 3 clutches in a year! Even more exciting, young bluebirds born on San Juan Island have returned there to nest, and have been seen exploring other nearby islands—including ours! A pair of Western Bluebirds was seen displaying nesting behavior in Metchosin in May 2011; the leg-bands the male was wearing indicate that he likely came from San Juan Island.



A translocated female Western Bluebird and her fledglings at a feeding station near their nestbox on San Juan Island. Photo by Dawn Fizzard.

Replacing Missing Habitat Elements

Adding nestboxes has reversed bluebird population declines throughout North America. Western Bluebirds are still observed occasionally on Vancouver Island but they no longer nest here. The re-introduction project on nearby San Juan Island has increased their numbers in our region and it is our hope that by providing safe nesting sites, we can welcome bluebirds back to Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands.

Since 2004, GOERT and our project partners have been replacing missing nesting cavities with nestboxes as far north as Nanoose Bay, supplementing earlier efforts by the Victoria Natural History Society. These boxes have been placed in Garry Oak savannahs in parks and protected areas, and recently, in healthy, pesticide-free agricultural areas and other open meadow habitats on golf courses and private lands. The project is focused in the Cowichan Valley, Metchosin, the Saanich Peninsula, and the southern Gulf Islands.

Re-introducing Breeding Pairs

The early successes of the San Juan Islands Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project provide us with hope, local experts, and a proven methodology for a translocation project in British Columbia. In spring 2012, we hope to begin translocating breeding pairs from healthy populations in Washington to suitable locations in the Salish Sea area. GOERT and partners have placed nestboxes in suitable habitats, and we are fundraising to support this continued re-introduction effort. Financial support for equipment and skilled experts is essential to the success of the project.

Help us Bring Back the Bluebirds!

To learn more about this project, to donate towards its success, or to find out other ways you can help to restore this missing piece of our endangered Garry Oak ecosystems, visit www.goert.ca/bluebird or contact GOERT at **250-383-3427** or bluebird@goert.ca.

* British Columbia's Red List includes any ecological community, indigenous species, or subspecies that is extirpated, endangered, or threatened in BC (www.env.gov.bc.ca/atrisk).