



BLUEBIRDS WELCOME

If You Build It, They Will Come

In Washington's South Puget Sound, western bluebirds arrive each spring to nest in rare oak-studded prairies covered in blue camas flowers and chocolate lilies. But the birds have faced a housing shortage in recent decades because of a lack of natural tree cavities and too much competition from non-native birds. Now, local school kids have come to their rescue, welcoming bluebirds with 100 custom-built wooden nest boxes.

The work of Project Bluebird, a partnership between The Nature Conservancy, The Tumwater School District, and other public and private groups, has helped the local bluebird population, with 12 pairs nesting in the boxes in 2005 and more expected this year. In the 1970s, bluebirds had virtually disappeared from the South Sound area.

Nationwide, other cavity-nesting species, including the brown-headed nuthatch, oak titmouse and prothonotary warbler, have ended up on conserva-

Many species, such as the western bluebird (pictured), rely on prefab housing, courtesy of woodpeckers or people.

tion lists because of the short supply of nest holes. The culprit is suburban sprawl, which has diminished prime nesting habitat while leading to increased populations of non-native house sparrows and European starlings, which compete for the limited number of natural cavities, says David Mehlman, director of the Conservancy's Migratory Bird Program.

"This is a real problem for species like bluebirds that can't make their own cavities but must rely on old ones made by woodpeckers." When no cavities are available, these birds simply may not nest.

—Jennifer Uscher



KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

Search for Ivory-Bill Goes On

From December 2005 through April 2006, more than 100 skilled volunteers and professional ornithologists scoured a fraction of the 550,000-acre Big Woods of Arkansas, looking for corroborating evidence that the ivory-billed woodpecker lives (see *Nature Conservancy*, Summer 2005). Although the teams made additional sightings and new and encouraging sound recordings, as this issue goes to press they have not yet found a roost hole or recaptured the bird on film.

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GIVE A BIRD A HOME

- **PUT UP THE RIGHT BOXES.** Consider the habitat in your yard and determine which cavity-nesting birds frequent your region. Bluebirds prefer houses made from untreated pine or cedar, mounted on a metal pole with an entrance hole one and a half inches in diameter (slightly larger for western bluebirds). You'll know you have bluebirds if the nest inside is in the shape of a cup woven from grass.
- **POSITION BOXES IN PREFERRED LOCATIONS.** For example, bluebirds and American kestrels prefer open grassy areas; tufted titmice like the edge of a woods.
- **DON'T CHOP DOWN DEAD OR DYING TREES** unless they present a safety hazard. Cavity-nesting birds like them. Woodpeckers especially will excavate nesting holes in dead trees but rarely take up in birdhouses. —



LOOK INSIDE A PROJECT BLUEBIRD NEST BOX AND LEARN MORE ABOUT HOUSING FOR CAVITY NESTERS @ NATURE.ORG/MAGAZINE/

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