

Bring Back the Bluebirds Project



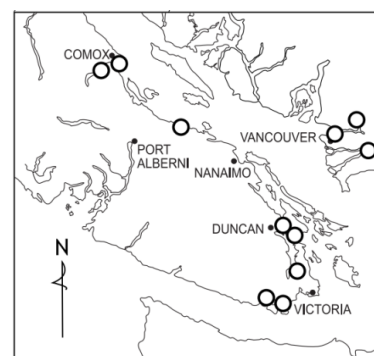
Adult male with one of his fledglings at a feeding station near their nestbox

As recently as 60 years ago, Western Bluebirds were common in Garry oak meadows and savannahs throughout the Salish Sea area. By 1995, Western Bluebirds were no longer breeding in southwestern BC and were rarely seen, and this population was placed on the Red List and considered extirpated (locally extinct) in BC.

Their rapid decline both here and in areas of Washington and Oregon was probably due to a combination of loss of Garry Oak habitat, removal of 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 European Starlings and English House Sparrows.

Today, Western Bluebirds are recovering throughout Washington and parts of Oregon thanks to ecosystem recovery and species reintroduction efforts. We are working with Vancouver Island communities to bring back the bluebirds to Canada's Garry Oak ecosystems.

Together, we can restore this missing piece of our endangered Garry Oak ecosystems.



○ former breeding sites

Bring Back the Bluebirds is part of an international effort to restore bluebirds to the Salish Sea area. **Our goal is to re-establish a breeding population of Western Bluebirds (*Sialia mexicana*) on southeastern Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands by:**

- Replacing lost nesting cavities by providing an abundance of nestboxes in good habitat, and
- Releasing birds from a healthy population.

Help us bring back the bluebirds!

To **learn more** about this project, **donate** towards its success, become a project **volunteer**, or to find out other ways **you can help to restore endangered Garry Oak ecosystems**, visit our website www.goert.ca/bluebird, call 250-383-3427, or email bluebird@goert.ca.

Replacing Missing Habitat Elements

Bluebirds are cavity nesters, meaning they rely on safe holes formed in large, old trees to build their nests. But as Garry Oak habitats have been developed, these natural cavities have largely disappeared. Throughout North America, nestboxes programs have reversed bluebird population declines. Since 2004, project partners have been replacing missing nesting cavities with nestboxes on Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands, supplementing earlier efforts by dedicated local naturalists.



Adult female at her chosen nestbox at the Nature Conservancy of Canada's Cowichan Garry Oak Preserve

These boxes are placed in Garry Oak savannahs and other open meadow habitats in parks, protected areas, and on private lands. Volunteers and landowners monitor and maintain nestboxes, which are also used by Tree Swallows, Violet-Green Swallows, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, and other native songbirds. The nestbox program is currently focused in the Cowichan Valley to support our re-introduction efforts.

Re-introducing Breeding Pairs

We are capturing Western Bluebirds from a healthy “donor” population in Washington and releasing them in the Cowichan Valley, a conservation technique called *translocation*. In 2012, we released the first pairs of bluebirds, and one pair nested at their release site—these were **the first Western Bluebirds known to have hatched on Vancouver Island since 1995!**

Since then, each spring we have seen an increasing number of adult and juvenile bluebirds returning to the Cowichan Valley. Many are successfully establishing breeding territories in suitable habitat, finding mates, and raising broods of their own. We are continuing translocations of up to 10 pairs of bluebirds each year until 2016, towards our goal of releasing a total of 90 adult bluebirds over the course of this 5-year project.

Funders

We are grateful for support from the following funders: The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund of Bird Studies Canada, Canada Summer Jobs, Canadian Wildlife Foundation, EcoAction, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, The McLean Foundation, MEC, North American Bluebird Society, Parks Canada, Public Conservation Assistance Fund, Science Horizons Youth Internship, The Sitka Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment, Vancouver Foundation, Victoria Natural History Society, and private donors.

Bring Back the Bluebirds is led by the **Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (GOERT)**, with partners **Ecostudies Institute, Province of BC, Nature Conservancy of Canada**, and the **Cowichan Valley Naturalists' Society**.

