

## How to Help

# Western Bluebirds

Western Bluebirds are attractive colorful members of the thrush family. They breed in the western and southwestern United States and southwestern Canada. Insect eaters during the warmer months, this species forages primarily on berries and fruits through the winter. Western Bluebirds have suffered a population decline due to habitat loss and introduction of House Sparrows and European Starlings from the Old World. You can help by providing open wooded habitats and nest boxes.



## What Western Bluebirds Need

**Food:** During the breeding season, this bluebird eats mostly insects gleaned from the ground or caught in the air, including grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, moths, beetles, bugs, weevils, termites, ants, spiders, wasps, bees, and flies. During other times of the year it eats mostly small fruits, including elderberries, grapes, mistletoe berries, blackberries and raspberries, figs, serviceberries, dwarf sumac, prunes and cherries, poison oak, juniper berries, dates, cascara seeds, chokecherries, thimbleberries, and currants.

**Nesting:** Western Bluebirds avoids developed areas, preferring rural open wooded or forested areas where tree canopy covers less than 20 percent of the sky. Unable to chisel out their own, they may depend on old woodpecker cavities 12 to 20 feet high in snag or trees. They can also be found nesting in snags in logged-over forests. Preferred nest sites are unobstructed by branches or leaves, and near forest openings. Males defend a territory of about 1.25 acres.

**Shelter:** Bluebirds often roost together in boxes or tree cavities, or in thick vegetation such as clumps of mistletoe.

**Other:** House Sparrows and House Wrens can usurp bluebird nest boxes

## How You Can Help

- Plant native fruit bearing trees and shrubs including elderberries, grapes, mistletoe berries, blackberries and raspberries, figs, serviceberries, dwarf sumac, prunes and cherries, poison oak, juniper berries, dates, cascara, chokecherries, thimbleberries, and currants.
- May visit mealworm feeders. Use where bluebirds overwinter, and in spring during inclement weather.
- Install fence posts if low hunting perches are not present in the area.
- Avoid applying pesticides that kill insects that bluebirds eat, or herbicides that kill fruit producing plants.
- Place nest box 4-6 feet on tree in open woodland. Box should measure at least 5 x 5 inches and 8 to 12 inches deep with a 1 ½ inch entrance hole. Boxes should not be placed near thick brush or where branches and leaves obscure nest entrance hole. More information at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org).
- Regularly check nest boxes during breeding season to monitor for nest predation or other problems.
- Clean boxes after each brood fledges. Repair and replace when necessary.
- Provide nest boxes for additional roosting opportunities. Leave mistletoe berries on trees.
- Remove House Sparrows if they try to nest in bluebird boxes. They may kill or drive bluebirds from nesting sites.