

## STARTING YOUR ROLE AS A MONITOR

Thank you for becoming a volunteer to monitor nest boxes for Western Bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Your work makes a tremendous difference to the protection and safety of these cavity-dependent birds.

SAFETY is our number one goal:

- safety for yourself,
- safety for the public
- safety for the birds.

**To achieve SAFETY the box must be in good condition and the hook well bent.** If you need a replacement box contact your area coordinator whom you can find listed on the Southern California Bluebird Club website.

## MONITORING SCHEDULE

1. Prepare for the season by early March to make sure the box is clean, the hole is free of rough places that cause feather wear, and fill cracks so a toe is not caught.
2. Monitor weekly April to mid-August.
3. Clean out the box at the last check in August.
4. Report results to CBRP state data base August-September.
5. Make repairs as needed to prepare for winter roosting.

Optional. Checking once or twice during October-March looking for secure hanging especially after strong winds. Also look for bees and get someone to remove them as soon as possible, or contact a coordinator for guidance.

## ENDING YOUR ROLE AS A MONITOR

When you need to stop monitoring, be sure to let the SCBC President know. A box abandoned can quickly become dilapidated if not transferred to another monitor for care. The President or another Club member will help with this. **Depending on the quality and location of your trail you may be directed to remove the boxes and return those in good condition to the Club.**

Turning over the following items to the Club is essential to the process:

- Box records
- Maps or sketches of box locations
- GPS coordinates, if possible
- Lifter basket
- Extra boxes

**The most helpful time to retire from your trail is late August.** This gives everyone time to prepare for the change.

## PLACING BOXES IN SAFE LOCATIONS

### THE BEST LOCATION FOR A NESTBOX FOR BLUEBIRDS INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

- About 2 acres of low grass in the general area
- Place boxes at least 100 yards apart, but preferably 200-300 depending on quality of habitat
- No outdoor domestic cats or feral cats in the area
- No House Sparrows are present
- House Wrens are not in the immediate location
- Area clear of raccoons (which can climb)
- Is away from places where people frequent (sidewalks, near busy roadways, playgrounds, sports fields and picnic areas. (Use discretion based on circumstances.)
- Is high enough to be out of easy human reach and risk of vandalism
- Place box on a strong, live tree limb of a size suitable to easily lift the hook on and off the limb
- Place the box to avoid entanglement with or obstruction from other limbs and foliage
- Place box on a limb with sufficient foliage to provide shade from the sun but avoid foliage that touches the box and permits ants to get into box
- Place the box so sprinklers do not hit it
- Paint boxes with light colors to reflect heat; consider camouflage paint if colors are not too dark.

Balancing all placement tips, orient the hole facing north or east for best weather protection, if possible, but not toward water, street or parking lot.

## MANAGING ANTS AND BEES

Ants will eat chicks after they hatch and must be kept out of the nest box. **Argentine ants** can be prevented from getting in the box by tying a small rag half way up the hook and wetting it with motor oil so the ants can not pass without getting oily. Add a little oil each week when you check the box to keep it effective, but use as little as possible. Keep twigs and leaves from touching the box by which ants could enter. In addition you can repeatedly douse the ants and their hole with soapy dish water. If ants still persist, please explore this link: <http://www.sialis.org/ants.htm>. **Fire ants** must be eliminated with the appropriate bait which the ants will take into the nest. Confer with a local expert such as Vector Control 714-971-2421. They prefer to handle these ants because people often worsen the problem by using the wrong bait. **Bees** will kill chicks and cause adults to abandon the box. You can spray the ceiling inside the box with Home Defense or Hot Shot insect sprays before the nesting season and in August when you clean out the box. It lasts for months. Do not spray when birds are using the box. Alternatively, you can glue fluffy quilt batting to the inner ceiling, then extend 1 inch down the sides and back of the box to discourage bees from building comb. Contact a SCBC member for advice to get rid of bees in boxes ASAP.