

PASSING THE TORCH

In the summer 2016 issue of journal of *Bluebird*, **President Bernie Daniel** challenged NABS members and readers to suggest ways to pass on our enthusiasm and knowledge of bluebird and cavity nester conservation to a new generation. In this age of cell phones, texting, social media and video games how can our generation ensure that future generations are aware that it is up to them to continue what we have begun? We in the Southern California Bluebird Club in Orange County, CA long ago realized the need to get youngsters interested, not only in the stopgap method of hanging and monitoring nestboxes, but to look to the larger issue of preserving standing dead and dying trees for many species, especially in our urban environment.

As such we have sponsored school **children's** projects, presented countless talks and PowerPoint Presentations to thousands in schools, set up webcam boxes, rewarded graduate students at California State University, Fullerton for their scientific research projects, sponsored Eagle and Sea Scouts in their quests for top honors, provided internships, and created and maintained two websites. We have also created a science-based educational program for elementary classrooms as well as a kit for outdoor educators. A Wildlife Tree Warden patch was designed to reward youngsters for their study of dead trees, and to engage youth at community events, we created several interactive tools and games, some of which are available on our website: <http://cavityconservation.com/engaging-youth/>.



Our efforts have been rewarded as our youngsters have gotten involved, returned to our meetings and made school and community presentations, won awards and scholarships, passed on their enthusiasm to their peers, finished and documented their graduate research projects, and gone into higher education programs in environmental studies. Here are a few:

Alex Krebs

One of our first mentees was **Alex Krebs**, who under the tutelage of **Dick Purvis** earned his Eagle Scout rank and garnered the prestigious William T. Hornaday Bronze Wildlife Protection Medal created to encourage and recognize outstanding efforts in natural resource conservation and environmental protection. In addition to his scouting achievements he organized the building of nestboxes, created a trail he monitored for several years and set up a website to document his bluebird trail success. He also made a presentation at the NABS Conference in Newport Beach in 2011.

A selected few of Alex's accomplishments are posted on his LinkedIn page: Bluebird Restoration Project (300+ hours): Led 15 volunteers in the building of bluebird nesting boxes. Hung boxes and monitored on a weekly basis during the Spring/Summer nesting season. Fledged over 200 birds since inception. (August 2008—Present).

Alex went on to UCLA to study statistics, and here are further activities he has posted: Statistics Club Executive Board: ASA DataFest at UCLA Chairman // UCLA Alumni Scholars Club // Alpha Lambda Delta / Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society // Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity.

Alex Krebs says: **Mr. Purvis** is one of the most dedicated environmentalists I will ever meet. He inspired my first conservation project, which in turn motivated me to lead other conservation efforts for my Eagle project. I'm so appreciative of the influence **Mr. Purvis** has had in my life, taking me under his wing and instilling the importance of conservation. He truly is inspirational, and is making his legacy one that will be enjoyed for many generations to come.



Alex Krebs and his mentor, Dick Purvis

William Cox

Another mentee was **William Cox**, who earned the Sea Scout Quartermaster rank by organizing and managing the construction of bluebird nestboxes. Along with **Alex Krebs**, Will made a presentation at the NABS Conference in Newport Beach, CA in 2011. He went on to college majoring in environmental studies at Soka University in Aliso Viejo, CA. He is the Student Assistant to University Archivist and is University Photographer.

Will says: My involvement with the Southern California Bluebird Club while working on my Quartermaster rank for Sea Scouts allowed me to develop skills pertinent to leadership, communication, and organization and implementing them in concert throughout my community service project. The difficulty of solving the many problems I encountered was

eased by the support of **Jim Semelroth** and other mentors from the SCBC. These skills have proven fundamental to all the projects I have done afterwards and this experience also served to direct the focus of my current studies. After learning of the habitat destruction of the Western Bluebird I felt a responsibility to help in this and other environmental problems facing us today. I then set my course to be an agent of change and I am now majoring in Environmental Studies at Soka University of America and hope to go into environmental management effecting positive change in our world.

Lexi Stanley

Another success was an internship granted **Lexi Stanley** for her work with **Gillian Martin**, Director of the Cavity Conservation Initiative, a project of the Southern California Bluebird Club. Lexi helped do snag surveys, helped to monitor tree swallow boxes, did a slide show for her fellow homeschoolers, assisted in many teaching projects of the CCI and then went on to an internship at the Maritime Institute in Dana Point, CA. Lexi's recording of *This Old Tree* can be heard on the CCI website on the *Engaging Youth* page at <http://cavityconservation.com/engaging-youth/> Of Lexi's experience with the CCI she says:

“During this internship I learned about the amazing ecology of a snag. The internship gave me valuable experience in public program directing and opened me up to the world of dead trees that I didn't know existed. **Gillian** knows so much about the snags and the numerous creatures that live in them. She effectively shares that knowledge and passion with the people she comes in contact with. I have not only gained a wealth of knowledge, but also a friend.”



Lexi Stanley teaching other youth

Recently Lexi added, “I do think about our work together every time I see a dying tree or a bird I can name because you taught me its name. The experience has made me much more aware of how snags greatly impact our world and I tell my friends about it when they comment of a bird I know to be a cavity nester.

Dessi Sieburth

Dessi is a most amazing young man who has stunned our seasoned bluebirders twice with his knowledge and enthusiasm for conservation at our monthly meetings.

One of Dessi’s many projects to help birds took the form of building and monitoring nest boxes for Western Bluebirds. He soon learned that though nest boxes are helpful, dead trees are much more beneficial in the long term, because they not only help bluebirds but many other birds and wildlife. With the support of his devoted parents, Dessi now takes his message to elementary school classrooms, science fairs and other events. When introduced, his impressive credentials alone are sufficient to get an audience’s attention. Among them are two awards: the American Birding Association’s 2015 *Young Birder of the Year*, and the *International Eco Hero Award*. Dessi also takes his own photographs and sketches his own bird images. His goal is to become an ornithologist.



Dessi Sieburth presenting to the SCBC in 2016

Read more on Dessi's achievements on his own website: <http://protectingourbirds.my-free.website/>

The Power of a Young Ambassador, Tomas Dardis

Tomas Dardis, a fourteen-year old, began monitoring eighteen nestboxes in 2015 with SCBC monitors. He has volunteered at SCBC educational booths, then after learning about bluebird and tree conservation he presented to his classmates in school. We featured Tomas in a blog after his assistance at a conservation booth in a county park. Read more about Tomas at: <http://cavityconservation.com/2016/04/03/the-power-of-a-young-ambassador/>

Tomas chose *Conservation of Western Bluebirds* as his 8th grade project. The students chose a project at the end of their 7th grade, and had almost one year to do the research and complete the practical part of their project.

He did research on the science, history, and geographic range of bluebirds. Of the eighteen nestboxes he monitored, he had 22 clutches, 93 eggs, 86 hatchlings, and 83 fledglings.

He presented this information to over 100 people, including parents, students, and faculty at his school. He demonstrated how to use the Purvis lifter basket, as well as how to monitor the nestboxes. He spoke about the problems Western Bluebirds faced, and the importance of natural cavities and snags. Additionally, he made ten nestboxes which he sold and raised over \$200 for the SCBC.

The school was so excited with this learning opportunity, that they purchased two nestboxes for the campus to show the elementary school students that they, too, can make a difference in nature. One of the nestboxes was quickly adopted by local bluebirds that already started building a nest.

Tomas says: "I like monitoring bluebird nestboxes, because I know that I can make a difference in the world. I enjoy working with the SCBC club and learning about conservation of birds and trees."



Tomas Dardis

Natalia Doshi, Jeanne Tiegs, Ellen Sorensen of California State University, Fullerton

Three students from the Department of Biological Sciences and Environmental Studies at California State University, Fullerton under the tutelage of **Dr. William Hoese** researched bluebird nesting habits and materials, temperature effects on fledgling success, and noise effects on bluebird reproduction. They presented their papers and research to our club members at monthly meetings. The bluebird club has donated funds to the Biology Department for further ornithological studies.

Jeanne Tiegs says: "My graduate project on the incorporation of man-made material by Western Bluebirds in their nests would not have been possible without the support of the Southern California Bluebird Club members. From choosing study locations for my project, to teaching me how to check nest boxes and monitor reproductive success, SCBC members guided me every step of the way. My time in the field proved to be much more than gathering data; I gained a love and appreciation for Western Bluebirds that I will carry with me for the remainder of my life!"

Natalia Doshi says: "I have enjoyed collaborating with the bluebird club. They have been so supportive in helping my colleagues and me in any way possible on our research. Our research projects have been a smooth and successful process thanks to the bluebird club's help and involvement. I've also learned so much from attending their monthly meetings from conservation biology and bluebird natural history to local community involvement. I have been inspired by their passion and everyone's dedicated work."

Ellen Sorenson says: “The Southern California Bluebird Club and their members taught me so much, were so supportive, and extremely helpful while I was working on my undergraduate research project, *How do insulation properties in Western Bluebird nests change between the first and second clutch?* I could not have done it without them. Their passion for environmental conservation is so heartening, if there were more people in the world like the members of the SCBC it would be a much prettier and better place!”

Prof. Bill Hoese says: We really value the guidance, help and collaboration we have developed with the club. My students and I are so thankful to work with so many dedicated people. Thank you, again, for your continued support. We are so lucky to be able to work with you and the other members of the club!



A group of Environmental Education students at Pitzer College in Claremont, CA learned about the habitat value of dead and dying trees. Their guest speaker, **Gillian Martin**, Program Director of the Cavity Conservation Initiative (CCI), left knowing that each student carried a new lantern for the mission of the program. After Gillian’s presentation and an examination of the teaching resources she shared, a class discussion, guided by professor, Wallace Meyer, produced many creative ideas about how to engage youngsters in the subject.

We in the Southern California Bluebird Club are very aware of the need to replace nestbox monitors as they retire, age, or burn out, but more importantly, to educate the young and to pass on our enthusiasm for birds, conservation and the environment to the next generations. As illustrated above there are many proven ways to get the younger generation interested and involved. Go to schools and scout troops, do presentations, create educational materials, get support from groups and industry, get publicity in local media, work with land and park managers, connect with colleges and university departments, create websites and link to social media, and provide funds for conservation projects. Our efforts have been richly rewarded as these young folks have picked up the challenge and have even taught us a few things about bluebirds and tree cavity conservation.

Jim Semelroth, Webmaster

Southern California Bluebird Club