



Western Bluebird

Coloring Instructions:

Black - the eyes, bill and legs

Blue - the head, throat, wings, rump and tail

Rusty red - the sides and breast (extending up over the shoulders)

White - the belly

Western Bluebird

Length: 5 1/2"

Habitat: Year-round resident in oak woodlands and orchards.

Field marks: Smallish blue bird with rusty colored upper back and breast.

Field notes: Often in small flocks.

If you walk among our oaks, you will discover many holes in the trees. Some of the holes were formed when branches broke off and the stump of the branch began rotting. The holes provide excellent shelter for birds and other animals.

Woodpeckers often expand these holes into a nesting cavity. Many birds build their nests in old woodpecker-excavated holes. The Western Bluebird is one such species. The introduced European Starling is another.

The explosion of the starling population has occurred at the expense of native species, especially the bluebirds. The starling begins occupying and defending a nesting cavity in the autumn, months before other species. By concentrating its defense on the nesting cavity, the starling can occupy nesting cavities more successfully than other species which try to defend a large territory. As the starling population grows, they occupy more and more of the nesting cavities.

Fewer bluebirds can find nesting places and so less babies are born. The bluebird population has dropped as a result.

The population of any animal is not stable. Anything that changes the number of births or the number of deaths will change the size of the population. The introduction of starlings influenced the number of births of bluebirds.

An additional problem for bluebirds and many other species in our area is the cutting of oak trees, either for firewood or for clearing land for building houses and stores. Bluebirds prefer a mix of open land with scattered trees. They perch in the trees and then fly out after the insects in the open areas. If the trees are cut down, the bluebirds lose their hunting perches.

The bluebird is a favorite bird of many people. It is a beautiful, fairly tame bird with a pretty song. It is valuable around orchards because it feeds on many insects that cause damage to fruits. Some people have responded to the decline in bluebirds by building bluebird houses. The hole size is very important to a bluebird house. If the hole is more than $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, a starling can fit in and take over.

Western Bluebird Challenges

- Identify a male Western Bluebird. It has a deep blue head and neck and a rusty breast.
- Identify a female Western Bluebird. It has a light blue or gray head and neck and a light rusty breast.
- See a bluebird drop to the ground for an insect.
- See a bluebird flycatch: it flies out from a perch, catches an insect in the air, and returns to the perch.
- See bluebirds in small flocks during the nonbreeding season.

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