

Eastern
Bluebird



Bluebird Project Is A Win-Win

By Keith Ashley, Tucson Audubon's Paton Center Coordinator,
and Jonathan Horst, Tucson Audubon Restoration Ecologist

When we hear about people transforming bird habitat, it's often for the worse—but not in this case. In early February a troop of Tucson Audubon volunteers mounted nest boxes for Azure or Mexican Bluebirds on two of the Sonoita Wine Guild's vineyards in an effort to strengthen this vulnerable population of the Eastern Bluebird subspecies, *Sialia sialis fulva*. At the same time, students from the University of Arizona, under the direction of bluebird researcher Dr. Renee Duckworth, mounted boxes at four more vineyards. In total about 50 new nesting cavities are now available to this tiny bluebird colony of southeast Arizona.

The collaborative project is dubbed "Win-Win for Azure Bluebirds and Arizona Vineyards" to emphasize its reconciliation ecology dimension: a conservation project with potential economic benefits for wine growers and the region. A stronger population of bluebirds could serve the vineyards as free and natural pest control. They might also draw more nature enthusiasts to the region through positive publicity around using land wisely to support both human and avian interests.

And, with this project, the "Wins" just keep coming. Dr. Duckworth studies the dynamics

of bluebird range expansion, inheritance of behavior, and a host of related ecological factors. Tucson Audubon is striving to ensure that our conservation efforts can augment her research, while her research strengthens our conservation efforts by informing us of the experimentally determined best practices for supporting the Azure Bluebird—the largest and palest subspecies of Eastern Bluebird, which happens to be a year-round resident in our region.

Yet another significant "Win" is the small band of dedicated volunteers moving this project forward. For several months now Joe DeRouen of Oro Valley has been the carpenter genius behind our experiments, providing several different box types: the Carl Little, the F-30, and the top-opening box Dr. Duckworth uses for her bluebird research in Montana. Many volunteers have helped to assemble the kits Joe cuts, though recently the lion's share of assembly has fallen



Gary Prosch and Lorry Wendland set up a new bluebird home

to Gary Prosch. Behind the scenes Rick Fletcher has taken on some administrative duties, helping Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds to become an official affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society. Lorry Wendland, Lois Manowitz, and Jim Dolph are generously contributing their prior knowledge of bluebird trails and boxes, dexterity with GPS, photography skills, availability to mount and

monitor boxes, and citizen conservation ethics.

A final "Win" would be to have your help! Several of the folks on our monitoring crew are snowbirds and will be migrating to cooler climes in the late spring. The project could use a few more people to help with the weekly monitoring of boxes. If you would be interested please contact Keith Ashley: kashley@tucsonaudubon.org or Jonathan Horst at: jhorst@tucsonaudubon.org.

A LFL by Lee Katzenbach under construction



Make That A Library To Go

By Lou Schatz

Several local artists have been busy creating unique housing for the Little Free Libraries project. Since the call went out last year, at least 15 local crafts people have volunteered to make one or more. The finished products will go on display at the Patagonia Library, as well as at various area businesses, early this month, and they will be auctioned off on April 18. A Little Free Library may be purchased prior to the auction at its established price

or at the auction itself by making the winning bid! Purchasers will then be able to set up the Little Libraries at their chosen spots.

The Friends of the Patagonia Library, sponsors of this project, hope that it will encourage informal book sharing by people who leave books that they love or take books of interest from the quirky little boxes. Visitors, walkers, and neighbors can all share in the treasures found in a Little Free Library and may find a new passion lurking in a book that they

might never have read or simply some entertainment when they most need it.

Proceeds from the Little Free Library event will fund a major expansion of the book sale capability at the library. Plans are to remodel space for display of sale books so that many more options are available to showcase the huge variety of donated items for sale to the public.

Look for further information in fliers, local media, or the library website as we get closer to the auction date.