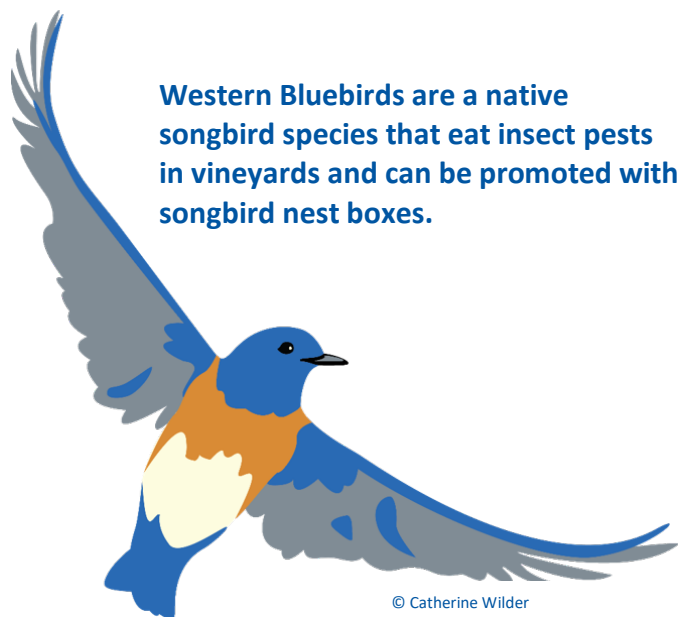


Attract nesting Western Bluebirds for increased pest control

Western Bluebirds contribute to biological control of common insect pests in vineyards. Installing and maintaining songbird nest box networks can increase their presence.



Western Bluebirds are a native songbird species that eat insect pests in vineyards and can be promoted with songbird nest boxes.

Nest boxes with specific attributes can increase occupancy and nest success

Historically, old trees provided nest cavities for Western Bluebirds, but now natural nest sites are limited due to safety, development, and invasive songbirds like European Starlings. Songbird nest boxes with openings 1½ inches in diameter are large enough for Western Bluebirds but will exclude invasive songbirds. Nest boxes should be approx. 6 x 6 x 12 inches, solid wood ¾ inches thick, and have a sloped overhanging roof. Features that allow ventilation and drainage are important too.



Image: Nestwatch.org

Key habitats and locations to place nest boxes

Western Bluebirds inhabit open oak or pine-oak woodlands, riparian areas, and grasslands. Vineyards surrounded by these habitats attract bluebirds and trellises makes good perches to hunt from. Nest boxes can be installed at the end of rows (if it will be out of the way of machinery and sprinklers) or on the edges of vineyard blocks. Hang boxes on poles at least 5 feet high, 50-100 yards apart. They can be closer if there are multiple cavity nesting species in the area. Consider placing in locations with afternoon shade to minimize effects of heat. Not suitable for areas with outdoor cats, as young birds are vulnerable after leaving the nest.

Maintenance is essential to keep nest boxes safe and functional

Annual maintenance should take place in fall. Inspect, repair deterioration, and remove old nests leaving nest boxes empty. Songbirds will bring in their own nesting material, and the species that used the box can be determined by what the nest looks like—Bluebirds construct grass nests and swallows make nests with feathers.

Resources:

- California Bluebird Recovery Program— cbrp.org
- Cornell Nest Watch— nestwatch.org
- Wild Farm Alliance— wildfarmalliance.org/nesting_structures