



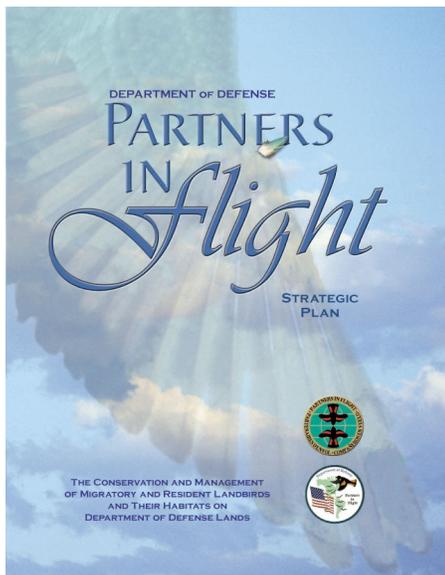
## Department of Defense Partners in Flight

Fact Sheet #5  
July 2010

## Department of Defense Partners in Flight Program

### Mission

*To conserve migratory and resident birds and their habitats on Department of Defense lands.*



The Strategic Plan can be found at [www.dodpif.org](http://www.dodpif.org), or through the contact information on next page.

# Bluebirds on Military Lands

## *Nest Box Program on DoD lands benefits cavity nesting species*

### Conserving Birds and Habitat

The conservation of birds and their habitat is a complex challenge. Birds occupy every habitat in North America, and don't recognize political boundaries. Identifying and protecting breeding, wintering, and migration stopover habitats further complicates conservation efforts. Human activity has a significant impact on birds that breed throughout the United States and Canada. Habitat "specialists" are largely declining due to habitat loss and fragmentation. Habitat "generalists" are often more adaptable to human activity. Nest box programs are one positive human activity in which some species, like bluebirds, have benefited.

### What is Partners in Flight?

Partners in Flight is a cooperative effort involving partnerships among federal, state and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, industry, the academic community, and private individuals. The central premise of Partners in Flight has been that the resources of public and private organizations in North and Latin America and the Caribbean must be combined, coordinated, and increased in order to achieve the greatest success in conserving bird populations in this hemisphere. The power of Partners in Flight lies in the synergy that builds when diverse, committed groups who care about birds work together for a common goal.

### The DoD Partners in Flight Program

Managing over 25 million acres of land on hundreds of installations, the Department of Defense plays a key role in bird conservation. Department of Defense lands represent a critical network of habitats for birds, offering these birds migratory stopover areas for resting and feeding, and suitable sites for nesting and rearing their young.

### Military Lands as Bluebird Habitat

Military lands provide excellent habitat for many species of birds and other wildlife. Much of DoD's acreage is used as a safety or security buffer, and is therefore not used for active training or other activity. Areas used for active training activities are often focused on a relatively small central "core" area, but

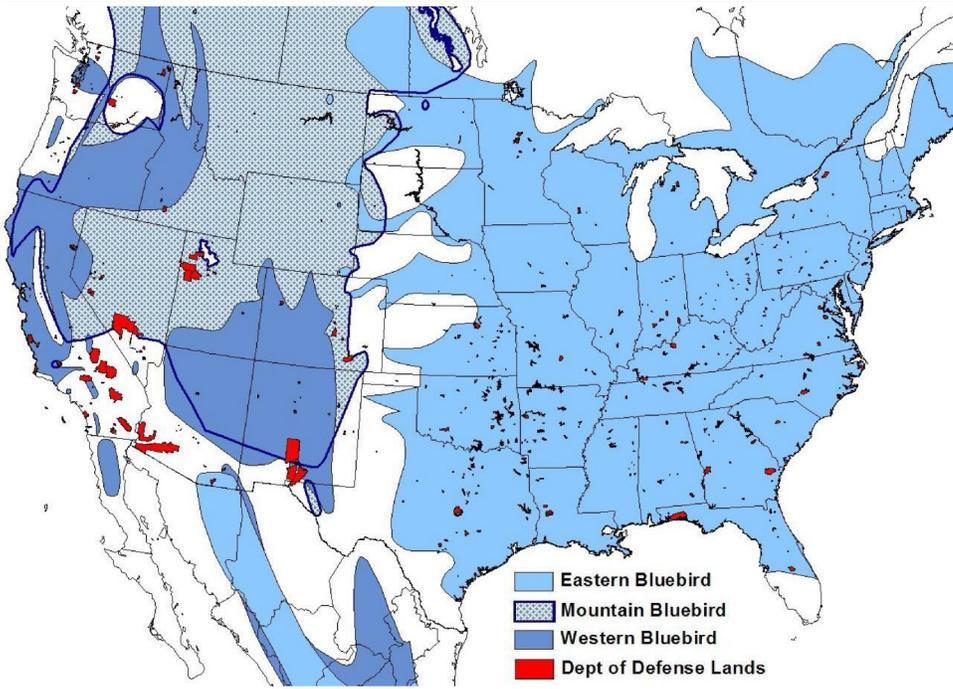


*The Mountain Bluebird is a Partners in Flight priority species. Photo: Dave Menke/USFWS*

maintain a much larger open buffer area. For example, parachute drop zones often provide excellent habitat for grassland species and bluebirds. These drop zones must be kept clear of woody growth, so are burned or cleared every few years. Nest boxes in these areas receive minimal disturbance and support high productivity for bluebirds. DoD installations are located in some of the most important regions for bluebird conservation, such as the Intermountain West, Colorado Plateau, and Coastal California.



*50 box bluebird trail along old cattle fence, Beale AFB (CA). Photo: Bruce Reinhardt*



Location of military lands and **breeding** ranges of Eastern, Mountain, and Western Bluebirds. Range map derived from NatureServe digital maps (Ridgely et al., 2003).

### Conservation Status of Bluebirds

The breeding range of the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) overlaps slightly with that of the Mountain Bluebird (*S. currucoides*) in the northern plains. The breeding range of the Western Bluebird (*S. mexicana*) lies within that of the Mountain Bluebird in the western US. Resident subspecies of Eastern and Western Bluebirds in Mexico have overlapping ranges. Within their ranges, Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds prefer open meadows or grassland areas, such as savannas or prairie-forest ecotones with groves of trees; Western Bluebirds prefer open, park-like forests, edge habitats, and burned or logged areas with sufficient snag density. All three bluebird species take readily to nest boxes.



Volunteer Craig Andresen checks a clutch of Eastern Bluebird eggs at Arden Hills Army Training Site (MN). Photo: Chris Eberly

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trends for 1966-1979 showed annual declines of 4.7% and 4.4% for Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds, respectively. Education efforts by the North American Bluebird Society have led to successful nest box programs and have helped reverse declining populations, and their overall respective population trends are increasing 2.4% and 1.5% from 1966-2003. 76% of the Mountain Bluebird population breeds in the Intermountain West, mostly in open aspen or montane shrublands.

The Western Bluebird has shown consistent (but not statistically significant) declines of 1.1% per year since 1966. Without nest box programs, this species would likely be declining more precipitously. Coastal (and central) California (34%) and the Colorado Plateau (18.5%) support more than half of their breeding population.

### DoD PIF Bluebird Box Program

So far, 30 installations have active bluebird nest box programs. Most of these (27) are in the range of Eastern Bluebird, and 3 are Western Bluebird. Some programs have been ongoing for over a decade, and others are just getting started. To date, more than 100,000 bluebirds have been fledged from DoD nest boxes. In addition, these boxes host other species such as swallows, chickadees, titmice, wrens, flycatchers,

woodpeckers, and nuthatches. Nest boxes have high occupancy rates, but also seem to have higher rates of predation than natural cavities. Many sites are in need of volunteers to assist with cleaning and monitoring boxes and birds. Other sites would make excellent hosts for bluebird boxes, but do not have (human) resources available to initiate a program. If you live near a military installation, please contact the DoD Partners in Flight Program to inquire about assisting with or establishing a bluebird nest box program.

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For more information:

**Chris Eberly**  
 Dept. of Defense Partners in Flight  
 540-349-9662  
<http://www.dodpif.org>  
[ceberly@dodpif.org](mailto:ceberly@dodpif.org)