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IRC WORKS WITH LAGUNA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO PLACE BLUEBIRD NEST BOXES IN THE IRVINE RANCH NATURAL LANDMARKS

Students construct and place new homes for disappearing birds

(Irvine, CA)—Staff from the Irvine Ranch Conservancy's (IRC) Science and Stewardship department will be escorting several students from Laguna Hills High School to place nest boxes for the western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) near Augustine Staging Area on Saturday, January 17. IRC staff and students will be meeting at 8 a.m. at IRC's headquarters (4727 Portola Parkway in Irvine) and carpooling to Augustine Staging Area from there.

The bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) is not officially rare, but it is disappearing from many areas at a fast pace. This species normally nests in existing tree cavities. The students built the nest boxes in wood shop class and had the design specifications approved by the Southern California Bluebird Club www.socalbluebirds.org. The nest boxes will be hung or mounted on trees in and around the Augustine staging area.

“This project will be a good experience for these students, because not only have they built the nest boxes, but they will also get hands on field experience, which is very limited in schools,” says Susan Anon, Field Ecologist, Irvine Ranch Conservancy. “The students are getting a multi-disciplinary, educational experience in woodshop, science, and natural resource management. The western bluebird will benefit from the availability of these boxes in which to build its nest since it generally relies on existing tree cavities or holes that are at times difficult to come by.”

The students will monitor the nest boxes and do observational studies in the spring, summer, and fall (March 14, April 11, May 9, June 13, and October 17). The nest boxes will be cleaned out after each brood has fledged. An IRC staff or volunteer will accompany the students and teachers each time they go out on the land to monitor. The Nest boxes will generally be placed at least 15 feet above the ground and will be approximately 300 feet apart to accommodate individual western bluebird territories.

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“This project has grown in interest and enthusiasm,” says Tom Williams, woodshop and construction teacher, Laguna Hills High School. “It started with the woodshop students making the nest boxes, the art students developing the color scheme so they blend with the surrounding natural environment, the construction students taking part in mounting the boxes and the biology students will monitor the boxes through fall. It’s become a collaboration between various departments within our school. It’s truly exciting for everyone.”

IRC is engaged in a wide array of stewardship and restoration activities on The Irvine Ranch Natural Landmarks and this is just one example of the various projects that help in the preservation of this magnificent landscape including the many special species that exist within it.

Nearly 40,000 acres of open space on the historic Irvine Ranch have been designated a Natural Landmark by both the State of California and the U.S. Department of Interior. This honor recognizes the exceptional value of these lands to California and the entire nation. The open space of the Natural Landmarks is part of the 50,000 acres of wildlands and parks preserved on The Irvine Ranch.

Irvine Ranch Conservancy is a 501(c)3 non-profit, non-advocacy organization created in 2005 to protect the Natural Landmarks on the historic Irvine Ranch and enhance the public’s connection to them, while helping partners and landowners with all aspects of stewardship. It offers a variety of free, guided outdoor programs for all nature enthusiasts including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and much more. For more information, visit www.irvineranchwildlands.org or call 714.508.4757.

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