

## Happy to be Blue

**WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE** the Mountain Bluebird around all year in Eldorado, but I see more of these beautiful all-blue birds during the winter months as some migrate here from their more northerly summer locations. These 7-1/4 inch long birds are sky blue from head to tail, with the underside usually a lighter blue. Females are somewhat lighter than males.

Although not obvious, the Mountain Bluebird is related to the common robin, both members of the thrush family. Juvenile Mountain Bluebirds have lightly spotted breasts, a characteristic of thrushes. Generally, Mountain Bluebirds live in open high country above 7,000 feet. However, my Eldorado house is at 6,810 feet and my first glimpse of a Mountain Bluebird was near sea level in San Diego. So don't believe everything you read!

They feed mostly on insects that they glean from foliage or catch on the wing. Some fruit is included in their wintertime diets. They are usually monoga-

mous, establishing territories up to five or six acres and forming strong pair bonds in the spring. The female selects the nesting site, a tree cavity or nesting box, then lines it with grasses, feathers, twigs and/or hair. Five or six eggs are brooded by the female the first six days. Eggs hatch in 13 or 14 days. Both parents care for the helpless young, which quickly grow and fledge in 22 or 23 days and are totally independent about five days after fledging.

Pairs may occasionally have a second brood. It is thought that Mountain Bluebirds reared in nest boxes imprint on nest boxes and prefer them for raising their own young. So maybe you want to buy or build one. Try Wild Birds Unlimited or the Internet for construction details: (<http://www.laspilitas.com/bluebird.htm> is one site.)

—Pam Hesline

