

TEXAS Blues



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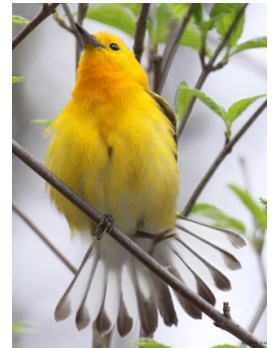
Other
Cavity-Nesters

Prothonotary Warblers



Female Prothonotary Warbler

Often called the Golden Swamp Warbler, the Prothonotary Warbler is a small songbird with brilliant plumage. The male's golden head contrasts with his large, dark eyes, black bill, and greenish back. Yellow extends over the belly, fading into white underneath the short tail. The wings are grayish-blue with black edges. Females have similar plumage, except with green washing over the crown. On average, Prothonotary Warblers weigh .56 ounces, measure 5.5 inches in length, and fly on wings spanning 8.75 inches. During the winter season this warbler is often mistaken for the Common Yellow warbler.



Male Prothonotary Warbler

Where Are They?

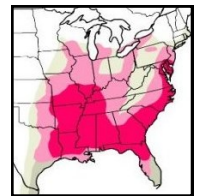
The Prothonotary Warbler (PROW) breeds throughout the southeastern United States and southern Canada. PROWs prefer areas with stagnant water, such as swamps, ponds, wet bottomlands, and lowland forests subject to flooding. PROWs can be found near running water with streamside willows. They also prefer low elevation, flat terrain, or shaded forest habitat with sparse understory.



Beginning in late July to mid-August, PROWs migrate to the warmer climes of the mangroves or fresh water swamps in northern South America and along the Caribbean Coast.

For seven months of the year, most Prothonotary Warblers live in mangrove forests. Expanding agriculture, shrimp farms, and tourism have caused significant destruction of these areas. The rapid deforestation of mangroves has coincided with simultaneous decline in Prothonotary Warblers on their breeding range. Mangroves continue to be lost at a rate of 1.7% per year along the Caribbean mainland, where petroleum spills and heavy metals hinder reforestation. Breeding habitat is also suffering as natural sites are diminishing.

PROW breeding range map for the U.S. and Canada. Texas is at the southwest corner of the range. Light pink indicates areas where PROW is rare or hard to find.



Those breeding here return to Texas in late March to mid-May.

Males arrive first and begin establishing territories in the same general areas as their previous year's breeding site. When females arrive, males court them intensely, singing and puffing their feathers in display. (Song: High, clear, metallic with emphatic rising notes *twseet twseet twseet twseet twseet*; males only during breeding season.) These warblers are monogamous, and the pair bond lasts the entire breeding season.

PROW is the only eastern wood warbler that nests in secondary cavities.

Continued on page 2.

Continued from page 1... *Prothonotary Warblers***Find a Home; Start a Family**

PROWs nest in natural cavities over or near water with the nest as low as 2 feet or as high as 32 feet above the ground. They will use nest boxes placed in shady areas near standing water. Nests have also been found in other less "natural" places, such as in a glass jar, a boat house, a mailbox, and an old enamel coffee pot. PROWs will use a bluebird nestbox if installed in the proper habitat and if the entrance hole is reduced to a safe 1¼" or 1⅝" to exclude larger birds such as bluebirds and woodpeckers.

Males make "dummy nests," but the female alone builds the nest that is actually used. The nest is formed from moss, lichen, dry leaves, small twigs, and bark strips, then lined with soft grasses and sedges.

Females usually lay 4 to 6 glossy white eggs with a cream or slightly yellow tinge. Eggs are heavily marked with reddish brown and purplish gray spots and blotches, in either a dense or very sparse pattern.

Who Does What?

Only mom incubates the eggs for about 12 days. Dad often brings Mom food while she is sitting on the eggs.

After 12 days of incubation, the young begin to hatch. For the first few days after hatching, Mom continues to sit on the nest, brooding the

young to keep them warm. Dad feeds both the young and his mate during this time. After a few days of continuous brooding, Mom begins to leave the nest periodically. Both adults continue to feed and protect the young, which leave the nest when they are around 11 days old. Young Prothonotary Warblers are reported to be expert swimmers. This survival skill is important



While up in Angelina National Forest, **Kathy Adams Clark** was able to photograph this very beautiful and very cooperative male.

since nest cavities often lean over water. If the young jump out of the nest, they can swim to shore unless a predator, such as a large fish, is lurking nearby.

After fledging, the parents divide up the young, only feeding their "set" of fledglings for about 35 days.

If Mom chooses to concentrate on starting a second brood, Dad takes over all of the feeding chores until the fledglings are truly on their own. In the South, Prothonotary pairs are able to raise two broods successfully. In

the North, with its cooler climate, two broods are rare.

Dinnertime!

One brood or two, feeding is easier with their wide range of food choices. PROWs eat insects such as butterflies, moths, ants, mayflies, caterpillars, beetles, aquatic insect larvae, spiders, and snails. In nonbreeding season, they also eat seeds, fruit, and nectar. They may

macerate prey like caterpillars or mayflies by whapping them repeatedly against a branch.

Are We Safe?

Destruction of both breeding and winter habitat from logging and agriculture and competition from other birds threaten the warbler's population, which is declining. They are already considered endangered in Canada.

In 2012, only 143 PROW nesting attempts were reported to NestWatch from the USA and Canada. In Texas, only one nesting attempt was reported.

It is critical to future studies that every nest you find is reported to NestWatch. Please help Cornell track this beautiful, but declining, species. All of your entries in NestWatch are valuable: www.nestwatch.org

Did You Know...

- A flock of warblers is known as a bouquet, confusion, fall, or wench.
- In spring, migrates earlier than any other North American warbler.
- Both sexes aggressively defend nest sites against other PROWs and other species. They may snap their bills while defending.
- Female usually moves newborn nestlings with all heads pointing towards center of nest.
- PROWs are frequently parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird.
- One in four nesting attempts fails due to predators.
- PROW nests have been spotted at Brazos Bend.



All facts and data used in this article was collected from the following websites:

www.sialis.org
www.birds.audubon.org
www.txtbba.tamu.edu
www.allaboutbirds/CornellLab

Parenting...

Not for the faint of heart!



Photo by Dave Kinnear



Photo by Beverly Reese Davis



Photo by Vanessa Voisenet



Photographer: unknown

East to West—What Happened Here?

► **From JoAnn Wilks** (4/23/13 Abilene)

I have a bluebird nest with five babies and one egg that did not hatch. The birds were found dead with no apparent trauma to them. What happened?

► **From Jennifer and Johnnie Fleming** (5/25/13 Orange)

We have had many years of bluebird nests and successful hatches. This year for the first time we had a nest where all 5 babies are dead. We can see no apparent reason for their deaths. What happened?

► **Our resident expert Keith Kridler offers this answer.**

This is actually really common to find a whole nest of young that are dead with no signs of an attack. Lack of food if the adults are killed can do this, or, if another pair of bluebirds drives off the original pair, they will often wait for the other birds young to die and then build over them at some point. It normally only takes seven days or so for a whole nest of young to die and be consumed by scavenger insects.

Sometimes Parents Can Use A Little Assistance

By Ken and Judy Ray (5/21/13)

As you may know, we've been keeping close tabs on the new bluebird family currently leasing the bird housing unit in our back yard. Late yesterday afternoon after seeing a crow really raising a ruckus in a tree in the back of our yard, Judy went out to see what all the commotion was. The crow flew off, and Judy looked up to the limb (about 12 to 15' up) where all the shaking had been occurring, and this is what she saw.

It was just a rat snake (although a good sized one—about 4½ to 5 feet long). So after taking its picture, we went back into the house and left it to do whatever rat snakes do (like hopefully finding and eating all of the field mice in the adjoining fields). We went out later to check on it (we thought that the crow might have injured it during their little disagreement), and saw that it was in the process of coming down from the tree. Just before dark, we saw a more pleasant sight: daddy bluebird, perched on a pole where he often stops for a minute or two before going in to feed his kiddies.



But this time we noticed that he just stayed and stayed on the perch, with the bug still in his mouth. So after about 15 minutes, we realized that it was possible that the snake might still be in the area and he didn't want to lead the snake to his babies. We went back out, and sure enough, the rat snake was in the grass about 15 feet from the birdhouse. At that point, even though we normally don't get involved in the law of the jungle, we violated the prime directive. I don't think the snake could have gotten through the predator baffle, so now I'm feeling remorse about killing the snake, but I can't undo what I did.

Reminder...

Use mealworms as a snack only since they do not provide adequate calcium.



Mom helps her new fledgling.

I saw my first bluebird egg February 7th, before we headed to the Kickoff in Kerrville. During one of the breaks, the Kickoff MC announced my early nest-

On Third Nesting Already

ing. However, soon after, it got so cold in spring that I thought they wouldn't make it. I am happy to report all four lived, and so did the next nest of five! And now, the third time we have four more eggs in the new nest. It's an aviary here. I am wondering if I scared the momma yesterday

while checking the nest as she flew out so quickly (must've started her nightly brooding when I didn't think she'd be in there). There may have been a 5th egg today if I hadn't startled her. But she's checking on the eggs, so she's not too upset with me today.

These eggs should hatch about June 20–21 then fledge about July 10th.

It is possible I could still have another two clutches this season. That would be a first for me!

Report/photo by Patti Marshall 6/3/13

Reeves Reporting Another Successful Year In Pipe Creek

Ruth and I send a bit of very good news. Our first nesting of five baby bluebirds fledged without trouble on March 22. Today the parents are busy fixing the nest for another go. They are very serious about it. Our "home place" nestbox is in our unused garden about 75 yards from the house. We have a spy camera to keep check on the activity. So far, nesting is perfect this year, but last year a predator (I believe a snake) ate the eggs before they hatched. (Joe will be sending photos from the spy camera for our next issue.)

I have 22 boxes spread over 82 acres. Birds make nests in them all, but only a small percentage are bluebirds. I also have six boxes placed along neighbors' property for a mile along Privilege Creek Rd. Most all of these are used by bluebirds every year. This tells me bluebirds like it better in open active areas rather wooded places. Joe and Ruth Reeves. (4/30/13)

It Is A Pile Of—Something In My Nestbox

Photo, report and count by Patti Marshall. (5/7/13)

The babies have fledged. Just when you thought it was safe to go to the nest...

I was anxiously awaiting the day for five nestlings to fledge our lakeside nestbox. Typical daily routine was to check around 5:00 p.m. My heart skipped a few beats when I looked inside and found nothing but a pile of — something.

I knew it wasn't fecal sacs, and there were so many! (This explained why the nestlings were sitting so high atop the nest during my ritual checking). Totally confused, I turned to the TBS Board of Directors. They sent my photo to Keith Kridler who provided the answer.

Wild Black Cherry pits.

You can plant these and grow some wild cherry trees. There will probably be one of these trees within about 200 yards of the nesting box. I have seen this a few times after the young fledge. The adults will sometimes feed the young fruit while they are inside the nesting box. After they are older, around day 12, they will sometimes be fed something like this. The fruit from the wild cherry is fairly small, but it has a normal-sized cherry pit that is too large to pass out of the gizzard and travel out of the bird through their digestive system. So once the cherry meat has been ground off of the seeds, the young will regurgitate the seeds, similar to what we humans normally

do with a watermelon seed as we spit out the seeds. Well, the baby bluebirds also just spit out the cleaned seeds and these end up under the young birds. It would be interesting to get a count of the seeds to see how many cherries that they were fed.

If you wanted to count them, you could clean them with a 10% solution of household bleach, soak them in it for about 15 minutes, rinse, and then count the seeds. If you do not want one of these trees in the yard, then toss them out along a roadside forest or woodland

area. Lots of species of birds just love the taste of these cherries. Once you see the tree, then you can spot quite a few of them in the area normally. I probably have several hundred of these trees on our twenty acres.

Following Keith's instructions, Patti cleaned and counted the Wild Cherry pits.

Final Count: 253½!



Musings From The Master... To Feed Or Not To Feed, That Is The Question

I am always amazed when I think that the three species of bluebirds and Tree Swallows have survived and thrived for hundreds of thousands of years. They have adapted to survive through Ice Ages, massive volcanic explosions, feasts and famines following wildfires and all sorts of local weather fluctuations that we humans have recorded only a pin point in the geological time frame! There was a massive effort to put up artificial nesting boxes back in the 1940's to help spread the bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds, into areas where they could not find "natural cavities." Back then, rural and even suburban families wanted insect eating birds to help kill and eat harmful insects out of their home gardens, out of their fruit trees, help keep the population of meat eating, blood sucking flies and mosquitoes off of their backyard livestock. You wanted birds that ate the flies out of the livestock manure, and heaven forbid most rural families still had working outhouses back in the 1940's, using hydrated lime in it to keep the odor and flies to bearable level.



Photo by Jean Drummond

Even in the 1960's and early 1970's when you could easily go and buy "bug and insect killers," you still wanted birds around that would thin out various species of insects.

Not sure when it happened exactly, but today it is more common to see, read and hear that in order to enjoy bluebirds we really need to treat them as some fragile pet. There is a million \$ industry promoting the idea of selling insects and insect feeders so that a novice can attract bluebirds to their yards. I get phone calls, emails and I am asked at bluebird programs, "How in the world do you buy mealworms for ALL of your bluebirds?"

One of the main foods of bluebirds is the caterpillars from moths and butterflies. There is more than four times the number of species of moths than there are butterflies in the USA. Many of the more common moths can lay upwards of 1,000 eggs in their lifetime, hatching into leaf munching machines. During peak insect times in pasture lands, insects, can and do, eat more grass than the maximum number of livestock. Another way to conceptualize this; there are more *pounds* of insects & living organisms (above and below ground) per acre than cows in the normal cattle grazing pastures!

Another really large part of the bluebird diet is beetles and beetle larva. Depending on the time of year, up to 30% of their diet can be all sorts and sizes of beetles.

Arachnids or spiders and other relatives are also a pretty big portion of their diet. In Texas we have some 300 species of grasshoppers, not to mention the various cricket species and katydids. This is why I have just never seen the reason to worry about trying to feed any wild bluebirds. To me, they need to be able to take care of themselves, adjusting to new food opportunities when "invasive" insects show up. They need to be able to adapt to changing habitat.

Remember that in 21 days or so after hatching out, the adult bluebirds need to educate their young on which of these are good and or safe to eat. They need to teach their young where to look, how to capture them, and kill and eat them safely.

Again we fret, or are alarmed, when "our bluebirds" disappear, and new bluebirds moving into our yards do not appear to know how to use bluebird feeders or they will not eat freeze dried mealworms. Why would bluebirds even want to eat freezer burned mealworms when they actually live in the Garden of Eden, having their pick of thousands of fresh, plump and ready to eat insect species?



Keith Kridler, everyone's resident expert, our favorite speaker, and cofounder of TBS, participates in several List-Serve groups focusing on bluebirds and their behavior. Keith has given us permission to publish his contributions to these groups. This is an edited excerpt from the Bluebird Monitors Yahoo Group.

Want to hear more -

Musings From The Master

**Join us Saturday, August 10th at the
2013 Annual Bluebird Summer Symposium**

Through his intriguing stories, humorous anecdotes, and birding experiences, Keith will share his immense knowledge of bluebird antics and behaviors. Discover for yourself why Keith is a favorite speaker!

**Bring your walking shoes. Keith is leading two
post-Symposium Walkabouts!**

Come Join Us! 2013 Annual Summer Bluebird Symposium

Texas Bluebird Society 2013 Summer Symposium will be held in Mount Pleasant, TX, in the heart of Northeast Texas on August 10, 2013. Mount Pleasant was once home to the Caddo Indians and has served as the county seat of Titus County since 1846, just a few months after Texas became a state. Mount Pleasant, known for its outstanding beauty, is surrounded by seven lakes and numerous beautiful parks.



The symposium will take place at the Mount Pleasant Civic Center with plenty of room for our featured speakers Keith Kridler, Belinda McCoy McLaughlin, and David Brotherton, lunch, and the not-to-be-missed FUNdraising Auction. Keith, who lives in Mount Pleasant, is a renowned author, speaker and naturalist. Belinda, who also lives in Northeast Texas, is a native plant enthusiast and a past president of the Native Plant Society of Texas. Belinda is actively involved with promoting native plants and conservation. David, an exceptional birder, lives near Daingerfield, and will be sharing his insights on Tree Swallows in Texas.

A box lunch at the Symposium will allow plenty of time for visiting our various information booths and to participate in the Silent Auction. We're sure you'll enjoy your day with us.

The Symposium registration deadline is July 27th. Register online <http://RSVPbook.com/2013Symposium>

We've negotiated with La Quinta Inn and Suites for a special rate (\$74.99) for Symposium attendees. Just call (903) 572-5514 and ask for the Texas Bluebird Society Group Rate.

For those who enjoy camping, KOA Camp just one mile from Civic Center.

Please join us for our Friday Evening Social: a BBQ dinner buffet at 7pm. Happy Hour starts at 6pm with byob drinks. Margaritas are available for a donation.

Plan on staying an extra day! Keith has planned two special events for us; WALKABOUTS!



Grab Your Walking Shoes And Join Keith In A WALKABOUT!



SATURDAY EVENING WALKABOUT I: Lake Bob Sandlin County Park

Join Keith on our first walkabout. Lake Bob Sandlin County Park is about 10 minutes from Mount Pleasant. The county park has about 30 bluebird nesting boxes of various designs, wood duck nestboxes, black bellied tree duck boxes on 40 acres that is mowed lawn grass height weekly or so, but they have several hundred acres of grassland/pasture land that is mowed twice a summer and can be chest high. They can have upwards of several thousand Purple Martins at the fall roost area, if the timing is perfect. Various water birds, sometimes Bald Eagles (one was there last week). Two public boat ramps with two restroom facilities at this one park. Lake Bob Sandlin is 7,000 surface acres of public lake. Monticello Power Plant, three coal fired units are just across the bay from the park, then another 1800 acres of hot water lake upstream and higher elevation, separate from Lake Bob Sandlin just by the high earth dam on Monticello. *Exact meeting time and location will be announced at the Symposium.*



SUNDAY MORNING WALKABOUT II: Kridler Family Property in Mount Pleasant

Members who decide to stay over are invited out to my property for a "show and tell" walkabout. I have about 20 acres within the city limits of Mt. Pleasant. Originally, this land was a cotton farm from the early 1900's till the 1930's or so. The soil was exhausted and farming was abandoned. The land was converted to a livestock pasture, allowing trees to volunteer and regrow. Today we have about 6 acres of daffodils, plantings of second generation select pines, several acres of Paulownia, acres or more of Black Walnuts, and an acre of Bald Cypress on a seasonal swamp area.

Various styles and types of nestboxes are scattered across the lawn areas and through the meadows. *Exact meeting time and location will be announced at the Symposium.*

Featured Native Plant: -- American Beautyberry

By Judy Hetherington

Callicarpa americana
(member of the Verbenaceae family)

The American Beautyberry is a shrub that grows to about 6 feet tall and just as wide. It is primarily an understory bush, liking part sunlight. The American Beautyberry is adaptable to all soils and needs only moderate rain. It is considered to have a high drought tolerance. It has long, draping branches with leaves that turn yellow-green in the autumn.

In the spring, the limb axils

are covered with small white flowers which attract butterflies. You have to be pretty close to see them. As autumn approaches, the leaves turn, and the berries develop as clusters around the stems at the leaf axils. The berries turn a beautiful purple color and then disappear as the birds absolutely love them. There is a white berry variety that is just as delectable to birds. This is a feed plant for bluebirds and the Northern Quail (or bobwhite), and the deer like its foliage.

Your American Beautyber-

ry will live 5–10 years and has a moderate growth rate.

The Native Americans used the roots and leaves for tea in sweat baths for rheumatism, fevers, and malaria. Root tea was used for dysentery and stomach aches including colic.

Source: *Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Plant Database.*



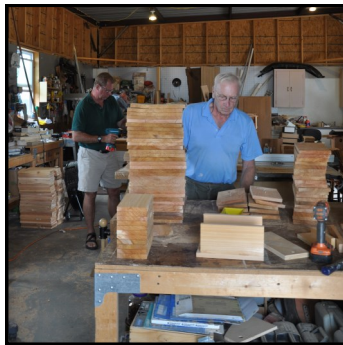
Next newsletter features a native plant loved by both hummingbirds and florist. Can you guess?



Spring flowers turn into beautiful purple berries in the fall.

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

- Debbie Bashaw
- Claire Boutte
- Sandy Brent
- Caryn Brewer
- Pat Conley
- Linda Crum
- Deborah Dalton
- Jennifer Fleming
- Brian Hetherington
- Judy Hetherington
- Bob Houck
- Elaine Lambricht
- Ellie Latham
- Harold Latham
- Don Lawrence
- Brenda Martinez
- Raul Martinez
- Ellie Mosley
- Paul Nelson
- Kevin Nelson
- Maggie Potts
- Shannon Ramsey
- Rex Reeves
- Kelly Russell
- Meg Scamman
- Nita Schiro
- Jimmie Shipp
- Annette Sigler
- Ron Tom
- Pauline Tom
- Bill Vick



Brian Hetherington is our Nestbox Master Builder! A never ending job as TBS continues to add hundreds of new members every year! Core team Jimmie Shipp and Bob Houck match pace with Brian as they assemble nestboxes for future events and sales.



Jimmie Shipp (front) and Bob Houck precisely measure, cut, and assemble, ensuring each nestbox is just right.



Paul Nelson explains the benefits of a TBS at BRIT Prairie Days nestbox to festival attendees in Ft. Worth.



Kelly Russell and Paul Nelson, along with Kevin Nelson, are event hosts at the BTIR Prairie Days in Ft. Worth.

Volunteers needed at Summer Symposium!
Call us at **512.268.5678**
If you can help.



Why TBS needs crew of volunteers at Wills Point Bluebird Festival: bottom left, Mark Carlson; far right, Ron Tom; under canopy on right, Harold Latham and Ellie; under canopy on left, Maggie Potts. (If you look closely, you can see Elvis in the background.)

TBS depends on volunteers for every task.
Event Host • Nestbox Trail Monitor • Administrative • Nestbox Builder
• Logistics • Speaker • Set Up/Take Down at TBS events • Write article
Volunteer Today!

Welcome New Members

Board of Directors

President

Executive Committee

*Pauline Tom
Mountain City*

Vice President

*Executive Committee
serves as VP*

Treasurer/AP

*Katy Couvillion
The Woodlands*

Assistant Treasurer/ Account Payable

*Executive Committee
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*Executive Committee
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Bronte*

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*Caryn Brewer
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We print names of all new members who give to us permission on Membership Form.

RA, Murchison• GB, Houston• RB, Wills Point• BB, Plano• JB, Plano• TB, Cedar Hill• SB, Bryan• NB, Arlington• PC, Hideaway• SC, Corpus Christi• JC, Ft. Worth• LC, Houston• DC, Liberty• KD, Ft. Worth• CD, Houston• JD, Flint• CD, Kirbyville• LE, Ft. Worth• CF, Brenham• PG, Spring• AG, Weatherford• JG, Plano• SG, Wills Point• H&CH, Nacogdoches• WH, Plano• SH, Terrell• JH, Tyler• KH, Wills Point• LJ, Athens• FK, Groveton• JK, The Woodlands• KK, North Richland Hills• LC, Nacogdoches• LR, Grapeland• LB, Decatur• LL, Watauga• DL, Ft. Worth• SL, Houston• PL, Terrell• MM, Plano• CM, Athens• TM, Houston• MM, • BM, Frankston• AM, • KM, New Caney• JO, Richardson• BO, Richardson• PM, Lovelady• MP, Terrell• RB, Nacogdoches• GR, Arlington• RR, Malakoff• GR, Arlington• SB, Decatur• SS, Fredericksburg• RS, Plano• FS, Houston• JS, Conroe• YT, Ft. Worth• VW, North Richland Hills• CW, Bullard

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Time to build the nest. Photo by Nancy Parr

Need Nestboxes?

Check for a nestbox distributor near you. Go to www.txblues.org main menu and click

Nestbox Distributors



Got nests? Watch 'em!
NestWatch.org

The Texas Bluebird Society newsletter, *TX Blues*, is published four times a year: March ■ May ■ July ■ October Debbie Bradshaw, Editor

Send street or email address changes to Caryn Brewer at: records@texasbluebirdsociety.org or send to our P.O. Box.

**ALL NATIVE
CAVITY-NESTERS
are protected by
federal law.
Do not disturb the
birds or the nest.**

**Monitor the nest and report to
NestWatch.**