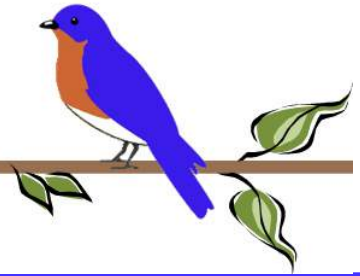


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter March 2016 • Volume 15. Issue 1

President Pauline Tom's State of the Organization Report

Thank you for your support of Texas Bluebird Society through your membership. Your membership is one of **1,009** current memberships.

Texas Bluebird Society closed out 2015 with **Membership #05380**.

Each year, some who "join TBS" just to obtain a free nestbox (our offer made at events and through distributors), do not renew. And, each year, some who joined that previous year renew along with others who have renewed year after year. And, each year we add Life Members (now 52!) who renew at \$250. This results in an ever higher proportion of current members compared with total membership.

Most of you accept an email notification when the newsletter is posted online, so your entire (tax deductible) membership dues go towards the work of the organization.

About 33% of 2015 expenses were directly **related to nestboxes**, including purchase of cedar and supplies, costs involved in nestbox dispersal, and renting storage for over 1,000 nestboxes.

Standards say that nonprofits should spend no more than 25 – 50 percent of contributions on fundraising. **Texas Bluebird Society spends 0.00% on fundraising.**

Volunteers do the work of the organization. The newsletter editor is a volunteer. Each member of the all-volunteer Board of Directors has at least one major responsibility. Each attends a monthly 2-hour Board Meeting via GoToMeeting. Actually, **every member is a volunteer**, as we all work together to spread "Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time."

Our budget contains **\$0.00 budget for travel and entertainment**. Board Members pay their own way to events and even donate the door prizes so that every donated item goes into the FUNdraising auction. Board Members also donate items for the auction.

We celebrate our 15th Birthday in 2016, and still our household membership rate is \$15. That's incredible. Most have joined face-to-face, and we have given to them a free "starter" nestbox. Still, with donations (starting at \$5.00) and exceptional management by the Board, TBS comes out in the black each year. We do not need to slow down giving away nestboxes, nor do we need to raise dues (at least not this year.)

To very minimal administrative expenses, Texas Bluebird Society **contracts for professional web services and bookkeeping services** (at discounted rates.)

At this point in TBS history, we have constructed over 13,000 "official" TBS nestboxes and branded each with the TBS logo. Pair this quantity with the 10,000's additional nestboxes installed through the influence of Texas Bluebird Society since 2001. We are, indeed, spreading "bluebirds (and other native cavity-nesting birds) across Texas...one nestbox at a time."

Texas Bluebird Society makes a difference in bluebird conservation. Our nestboxes result in the production of bluebirds, many in vicinities where bluebirds had not previously been observed. The most current Eastern Bluebirds range map in "Birds of North America" shows a wider range in Texas than 15 years ago.

Texas Bluebird Society makes a difference in citizen science. We have influenced Texans to participate in NestWatch.org, making nesting records available to scientists while keeping the records for individuals and providing detailed maps of nestings online

And, Texas Bluebird Society makes a difference in the quality of life for humans exposed to the object of our affection. Adding bluebirds in Texas is akin to spreading wildflower seeds, bringing joy to human hearts. As bluebirds are now a "species of least concern" (according to ornithologists), our species needs them more than their species needs us. What a difference our efforts make in the lives of humans.

Each of us has a bluebird story (even if, for you, it's a photo on a website) and a sphere of influence. Even if you have no bluebirds, your support of this organization through your membership makes a difference in bluebird conservation and in the lives of those who see and experience bluebirds because of Texas Bluebird Society.

Peace, hope and love — Pauline

Attract Birds With Native Plants: **Strawberry Bush**, *Euonymus americanus*

By **Linda Crum**, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist



Strawberry bush and hearts-a-burstin are two common names for this native, airy, deciduous shrub that grows to 4 to 6 feet tall. The shrub is rather upright not taking up much room in the landscape. The common names are derived from the appearance of seed pods produced in the fall. The leaves also will give good fall color turning a burnt-red color.

E. americanus is native to eastern United States from Florida to East Texas and north to New York. Its preferred habitat is moist woodlands, low sandy thickets and swamps. It prefers slightly acidic soil rich in humus content. Expect to supply water in times of drought. A thick mulch layer will help retain moisture in the soil. Light requirement is part shade. Although full shade is tolerated, strawberry bush will not bloom reliably in dense shade.

The branches of strawberry bush are green rather than brown like most shrubs. They turn purplish when exposed to sun. Flowers that appear in May and June are very inconspicuous. Small, pale green flowers with purple stamens have five, distinct clawed petals. From these flowers come the most unusual warty, red seed



pods in the fall that look like strawberries. They burst open to reveal orange seeds that are relished by raccoons, squirrels, bluebirds, yellow-rump warblers and other birds. Deer will also graze on the leaves of the plants.

Propagation is by semi-hardwood cuttings taken in fall which root readily with no hormone treatment. Spreads by rhizomes. Stems will root at the nodes where they touch the ground. Germinating seed can be difficult as they require a period of stratification.

No serious insect or disease problems occur. Watch for euonymus scale. Mites, leaf miner, aphids, mealybugs and crown gall are common. Stem dieback, powdery mildew and fungal leaf spots may appear. Keep the plant well-mulched and irrigate, reducing stress that brings on these problems.

Remember our feathered friends as you garden and landscape this spring!

Texas Native Plants That Attract Food for Eastern Bluebirds

Berries - Bluebirds primarily eat insects, but they supplement their diet with berries. Enhance your nestbox's surroundings by planting these Texas native plants nearby.

Insects and spiders - Attracting insects and spiders to your garden may sound strange but Eastern Bluebirds primarily eat insects. This list will show you the plants that attract the insects and spiders that Eastern Bluebirds like to eat! Attract more Bluebirds to your garden by planting these Texas Native Plants to attract the right "bugs." (Plant lists are on TBS website: txblues.org)

From Passive to Active House Sparrow Control: An Emotional Journey

Article by Judy Ray and photo by Ken Ray

The House Sparrow (HOSP) *passer domesticus* is probably the number one predator of bluebirds (see www.sialis.org). It is a non-native bird that was deliberately introduced in North America in the 1850's in New York City and later in many other cities throughout North America. Why was this done?...for insect control and nostalgia. But very soon, the HOSP was discovered to be a pest. It destroyed some of the very crops and trees it was supposed to help. In addition, the HOSP also began displacing native birds—especially the bluebird. So the moral of the story is, “What was done with the best of intentions, had unforeseen and tragic consequences.” And so we are left to deal with the mistakes of our great, great grandparents.

HOSPs are aggressive towards bluebirds and will kill adult birds, hatchlings, and eggs. There are many photos on-line showing the gruesome results of HOSP attacks on Bluebirds at www.sialis.org.

There are two philosophies of controlling HOSPs: (1) passive control, and (2) active control. At first, most people probably prefer passive control which is simply using techniques to discourage HOSPs from a particular nest site. The bird is not harmed. These techniques include:

- Nestbox placement
- Sparrow spookers
- Monofilament
- Removing food that attracts HOSPs



For more information on passive control see www.bluebirdnut.com.

My husband and I began bluebirding with a nestbox from the Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) which had the organization's name and an image of a bluebird clearly burned into the front. However, we soon discovered that either HOSPs cannot read, or they deliberately ignored the fact that the nestbox was placed in our backyard for the *exclusive* use of bluebirds. We strongly suspect the latter. ☺

Since the TBS logo did not discourage HOSPs, we began using a variety of passive measures which were successful...until this year! For some unknown reason, HOSPs were plentiful and more aggressive in claiming our nestboxes this year. Keith Kridler has pointed out that there is often a few years' knowledge-gap between a novice bluebird landlord and a veteran bluebird landlord. The first year a person puts up a nestbox, it may or may not be monitored. In addition, if it is taken over by HOSPs, the novice landlord may think, “What's the harm? They have as much right to the nestbox as a bluebird.” But after witnessing a destructive HOSP attack, a novice bluebird landlord will likely take more drastic measures to control these pests, because left unchecked, HOSPs can not only take over a nestbox, but can take over an entire bluebird trail. (See *Bluebird*, spring 2012 pp. 8-9).

So we have made the difficult decision to engage in active HOSP control. Active control *does* harm the bird, so it goes against everything we cherish about caring for wild birds. After all didn't Jesus say, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father.” (Matt. 10:29) BUT it is noteworthy that God in His infinite wisdom did not place HOSPs and bluebirds on the same continent—humans did. So we ordered a Van Ert HOSP Trap and bought a mesh bag.

I would like to stop this article right here, because you know where it is going. We trapped and euthanized two HOSPs this past season (2015). Enough said on that. U.S. Federal Law allows destroying nests, eggs, and euthanizing HOSPs because they are non-native. Relocating HOSPs is not a solution. It merely transfers the problem to someone else.

We can't control every unpleasant thing that happens in nature, but as conservationists, we can exercise responsible management on our property. Regrettably, responsible management sometimes requires unpleasant tasks. It brought us no joy to euthanize a HOSP. But it is also irresponsible to put up a nestbox and not deal with predators. And so we, like many veteran bluebirders, have taken the journey from passive to active HOSP control. This step was not easily taken, but we are convinced it was the right thing to do.

A personal story with photos from Alec Wyatt

Black Forest Firebirds: Bluebirds and the Power of Resilience



The 2013 breeding season in Black Forest was shaping up to be an auspicious one. It was June 11th, and my small Colorado hometown was about to play host to the hatching of dozens of baby birds in a spectacular burst of new energy and life. I had been eagerly checking my nestbox trail every week since early April for signs of life, and today was the day I expected to find the first intrepid bluebird to emerge from one of sixty-three eggs in my nestboxes. The afternoon was hot, unusually so, and I planned to wait until later in the afternoon to check each of my thirty-six carefully tended nestboxes for signs of life. This was my second year studying the breeding of Western Bluebirds, Pygmy and

White-breasted Nuthatches, Tree and Violet-green Swallows, and Mountain Chickadees, and my fifth year enjoying the fruits of summer in Black Forest.

I never got the chance to check the nestboxes that afternoon, as by the time the sun went down that evening, thousands of acres of Black Forest were engulfed in flames. In the early afternoon of what turned out to be the hottest day of a year plagued by drought, a human-caused fire of unknown origin was started about three miles from my home and four miles from my nestboxes. My family was forced to evacuate immediately, and as I gathered my possessions before departure, I could not help but wish to bring my nestboxes instead. A home can be replaced; the lives of sixty-three young birds cannot.

I spent that night in a hotel with my family, and together we watched as the number of homes destroyed by the Black Forest Fire escalated. The fire raged on into the night, and for the next several days, I became more and more concerned for the fate of the bluebirds. By the second day, it had become clear that the property on which the nestboxes stood had burned, but the severity was unknown. Even if the nestboxes had not been destroyed by the still-raging fire, the forest was enveloped in a plume of thick, dark, sweet-smelling smoke from the combustion of millions of Ponderosa Pines. The uncertainty prompted too many questions to count. Had the nestboxes already been lost alongside the hope for a prosperous bluebird season? Even if the boxes still stood, would the adult bluebirds have stayed in spite of the blaze and the oppressive smoke? I slept to the smell of smoke with a fear of what the next days would bring.

Wildfire is a natural part of the cycle in a Ponderosa Pine ecosystem. It typically occurs naturally, about every ten years, in relatively regular low-intensity burns that clean up the forest and restore the ecosystem. But the Black Forest Fire was no natural fire. This was a result of years of neglect and unwillingness of residents to mitigate their properties. In the midst of a record-breaking drought, Black Forest was a tinderbox that summer, full of decades of accumulated fuel that could only lead to a disastrous conflagration. All it took was a spark to render a burn far more destructive than anything nature could inflict, and I was about to find out firsthand the results of years of human negligence.



... continued from page 4

Five days passed before I was allowed back into Black Forest. The flames had rendered unrecognizable 14,280 acres of forest and incinerated 486 homes. The blaze had surpassed the previous year's Waldo Canyon Fire as the state's most destructive wildfire in history, and it happened far closer to home than I ever thought it could. Because of shifting wind patterns, my house was spared by a margin of just over a quarter of a mile. While I was grateful that I still had my home, I felt no good feelings upon returning home, as I felt the immense loss of my neighbors' lives and properties, the loss of thousands of acres of habitat, and the uncertainty of the lives of the bluebirds. My nestboxes remained within the mandatory evacuation zone for more than a week longer, leaving me to wonder about the state of my forest just a few hundred yards down the road.

On June 27th, I ventured into the charred, smoky landscape near my home to investigate the damages. The forest floor resembled fresh asphalt, and in many places, the trees had been stripped of needles from bottom to top leaving behind only a black skeleton. One by one, I trekked over the ashes to see the fate of the boxes and the birds. Amidst the wasteland before me, I was relieved to discover that at least some of my boxes still stood. Bending toward the charred grass to peer inside a smoky Box 4, my excitement was indescribable and my heartbeat audible as I discovered four young feathered bluebirds, bright-eyed and healthy, growing up in the nestbox inches above the ashes. I hiked on



to discover that all thirty-six boxes had survived the fire even though the ground beneath every box was burned. Only one box, number eighteen, sustained severe damage, and it was one of only a few unoccupied boxes. At the end of the day, I found a total of forty-seven living, healthy nestlings in my nestboxes, all fed and tended by the dozens of adult bluebirds and other species that stayed to incubate their eggs during the fire. The vast majority of those forty-seven nestlings had hatched from eggs laid before the fire, indicating that the adults were not absent from their nests for long in spite of the raging wildfire.



By the end of the summer, fifty-eight birds had fledged from the nestboxes—forty-five of which were bluebirds—and I had constructed fourteen new boxes with the help of local children to round out the total number of boxes to fifty. In spite of the most destructive wildfire in Colorado history, the Black Forest bluebirds managed to fledge eleven more young than they did in the previous year, an inexplicable feat that can only be admired with wonder. In the years following the Black Forest Fire, the human residents began to rebuild their homes, the trees and grasses began to grow back, and the avian residents returned to the trail to produce record numbers of fledglings. The Black Forest firebirds, by following their instincts and tending their nests with

the same conviction they always do, managed to teach a lesson remarkably applicable to the human experience. The bluebirds taught the residents of Black Forest to persevere and to find resilience in the face of the seemingly insurmountable. With the scar of the past wrought upon the forest I called home, this is a lesson I will take to heart.

Musings From The Master

Spare the Rod And Educate the Child?

We have a lake home near Dallas. Two weeks ago we had neighborhood children open up our 2 boxes with nests and 5 eggs each and take nests and eggs. So, so sad.

One daddy bluebird has sat on top of the empty bluebird house ever since. We have seen no sign of momma bluebird nor is there a nest in the box yet.

Is this normal? Will they rebuild in a house that was vandalized like that? Why does daddy bluebird continue to sit on the top of the house day in and day out? It is heart breaking to watch.

OK, I know I being a little over emotional but this was really upsetting to us. Thanks for any advice, words of wisdom, etc.

A member sent this email to the editor. It was forwarded to President Pauline Tom and our own bluebird expert Keith Kridler requesting they respond to our distraught member.



Photo by Jeff Burcher

President Pauline responded:

How tragic AND against the law. Perhaps the local TPWD game warden would consider getting involved.

You could add screw (even a hex screw, if needed) to close nestbox to lessen likelihood of human predation in future. In meantime, it seems male hopes to attract female willing to nest in that box. There's nothing you can do to help. You CAN report nesting observations to NestWatch.org Even reports of failed nestings provide valuable info for science.

Thanks for providing nesting cavities for Texas bluebirds.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated experience. For those of us who love bluebirds it is very easy to immediately respond negatively to "those brats," thinking there should be some form of retribution for their acts. **Keith Kridler** shared his thoughts on the incident ...

I personally believe the "Federal and State Laws" protecting birds are NOT useful when dealing with the public, especially as we try to teach and educate children. Obsolete federal laws written almost 100 years ago to deal with "market hunting" and killing birds for their feathers back in the late 1800's early 1910 or so is NOT going to apply to bluebird nests getting removed, after the fact. These bird laws to children are like "Speed Limit" signs on highways to adults.

I would approach the parents and or grand parents, your neighbors at the lake? Offer to "educate and or share knowledge" with these children! Offer to help the children put up one or two cavity nesting species boxes on "their" lot so that you can "help them/the children" monitor and help the local birds.

Print out a couple of the information sheets from TBS and or maybe even information on Wood Ducks and or the now common Black Bellied Whistling Ducks, to show that "some bird species are just like humans, these species of birds want to live in a wood house like people do." This house protects not only the adult female while she incubates eggs, but a wood house with correct entrance hole sizes and predator guards on the poles will protect the eggs and young birds until they fledge. Nestboxes protect them from harsh weather and storms.



Like people, bluebirds "pair up" to build a nest and raise a family, some will mate for life here in Texas and the southern states, although some bluebird pairs split up after a year or two. If either adult bluebird dies, the surviving bluebird will go ahead and raise their young by themselves, or until they find another mate to help them. The baby bluebirds that survive this summer will stay with their parents until the end of this next winter. Then these young "go off" and find a mate and raise a new family, nearby. The "Circle of Life" continues like this for all species.

Eastern Bluebirds in southern states tend to come back to nest in the same area where they were born, pairs of bluebirds may nest in the same nesting box, year after year.



Photo by Linda Crum

Once the eggs are laid, only the female bluebird can incubate the eggs. Eggs need to be kept at a near constant 99°F temperature for them all to hatch with no birth defects. Human core body temperatures are 98.6°F or nearly identical temperatures for birds and humans. This is why many viruses that affect/live in birds can also affect/live in humans. For example “Bird Influenza”. Temperatures only as high as 109°F can kill the embryo’s developing inside of eggs and or body temperature in baby birds at 109°F can kill them, just as a human will suffer severe damage with a “fever” this high.

Bluebird eggs hatch in 13 days into helpless, mostly “naked” baby birds. Chickens hatch in 21 days with downy, fuzzy feathers and can follow their mother around within a day.

After bluebird eggs hatch out of their shells, in just 16 to 18 days the baby bluebirds can FLY! A baby bluebird develops/grows as much every day as a human baby does in a year. At 16 years a human baby is old enough to legally drive a car, while baby bluebirds at 16 days old are capable of “flying”.

Cavity nesting species of birds can be carefully monitored as they grow. If you are careful you can open up and observe the baby birds as they grow from the time they hatch out until they are almost ready to fly! This makes for a great science project, being able to study/observe these birds right in your backyards! There are in the nestbox cameras that allow you to observe what happens in the nesting boxes 24 hours a day. Look up “nest cams” for a link to add in here. Many schools set these types of cameras up, run wires from the nestbox to the TV monitor in the classroom and then record what is happening during the 30 days or so from egg laying to baby birds flying!

If the children decide to “monitor” these nesting boxes, then they can report and share this information with Cornell University through NestWatch.

Although we are “upset/mad/angry” that these children stole the nests and eggs out of these backyard nestboxes, the bluebirds will build new nests and lay more eggs, somewhere. If you think about this, it is not all that different from us adults when we go out everyday and “rob eggs” from our backyard chicken flocks, or is it?

If at all possible use this bad experience, with a little creativity you can turn this into a life long, positive experience for these children their parents and grand parents, hopefully this will or could expand into a development wide “bluebird trail”. Where everyone is made more aware of what their “neighbors” are doing. Normally people buy houses “out on the lakes” to get closer to “nature”, problem is we ALL make mistakes that negatively affects wildlife. You can make a difference, one child one family at a time.

Follow up from owner...I did not follow up with the children/their parents as most were gone by the time I discovered our missing eggs and I have found that unless I can speak to people face to face in situations like this one then it can easily result in my intentions being misinterpreted. I did speak with neighbors that they were visiting, it was a productive visit, so I do not anticipate further problems and hope they will follow up with the children. I do not think it was meanness or mischief but curiosity of the blue eggs and lack of knowledge and respect for nature and wildlife. If they return I will approach them with a "teaching moment" in mind.

And YES our daddy bluebird finally found a new mate after sitting on top of the box day after day for nearly an entire month. It was excruciating to watch but our new bluebirds had 2 different hatchlings (is that the proper term?). We were so relieved and excited and hope they will return next year as our prior ones did for the last 4 years, producing 2 to 3 hatchlings/summer.

I so appreciated the various responses and people reaching out. Keith contacted and followed up with me several times and his comments were always educational and very sensitive and healing for me. He particularly helped me through our first disaster. We have placed nails in our boxes so they cannot be easily opened as several people suggested.

President Pauline Tom: "I love Keith Kridler. What a wonderful example of the value of his counsel and expertise. Thank heavens, he is our "Expert" close at hand, with over a half a century of experience. Keith has been my mentor from the beginning of my actual involvement with bluebirds."

Excerpts from *Managing Ants In The Garden* by **Angela Chandler**

Angela Chandler is a lifelong gardener with a passion for learning and teaching. She and her husband, Fred, tend a ½ acre garden in Highlands, Texas that includes vegetables, fruits, herbs, ornamentals, a small experimental nursery, a flock of chickens, organically managed beehives, two pet goats, a Lab mix named Harley, and a little mutt named Ditch that husband Fred rescued from.....wait for it.....the ditch beside the back gate.

Visit her website [The Garden Academy](http://TheGardenAcademy.com)



Managing Red Imported Fire Ants



Ants are an amazing species. There are indigenous ant species on every continent except Antarctica. It is estimated that ants may make up as much as 15% - 25% of the terrestrial animal biomass. In general, ants are beneficial insects. Their tunneling activity mixes and aerates the soil. Ants are an important food source for birds, reptiles, and some mammals.

There are 260 species of ants in Texas. The most serious pest species, in the human perspective, is the Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA).

Identifying RIFA

The most important first step in effective management is learning to distinguish RIFAs from other species. The RIFA is 1/8" – .1" long and is coppery brown to coppery black in color. The workers have the same body proportions along their length – the head is never wider than the thorax. If the ants in a colony are all the same size, the colony is probably supported by one queen. If the ants are varying sizes in the same mound, the colony is probably supported by more than one queen. The average worker ant is usually smaller in multiple queen colonies.

Their mounds differ in appearance depending on the time of year and the weather. If a mound is apparent, it will be made up of very finely-grained balls of soil. (Note: small RIFA mounds will resemble earthworm castings; please make sure you do not treat worm mounds with orange oil solutions!)

There may be more than one mound in a visible area. These mounds may be from separate colonies or may all be connected to the same nest – a maze of galleries, tunnels, and chambers that may extend more several feet underground.

Native fire ants resemble the RIFA in many ways, including mound characteristics. The fastest way to distinguish RIFAs from other ants is to stab a stick into the mound. RIFAs will boil out of the mound and rush up the stick aggressively. Native fire ants do not match the RIFA for aggression. Be sure to remove the stick before they reach the top! Observe the worker ants that have emerged – if the heads of the largest workers are larger than the thorax, they are native fire ants.

Managing RIFA

RIFA can be managed with broadcast baits, with mound treatments, or a combination of both. Broadcast baits are used to treat entire yards or gardens. They are non-selective; any ant that is attracted to the bait will pick the bait up and take it to the mound where it will be fed upon by the colony. Therefore, broadcast baits should only be used when it has been verified that there is no population of native ants in the forage area.

Broadcast baits are composed of a tiny amount of a stomach poison encapsulated in corn cob granules that are infused with soy oil. RIFA is a grease eater. The oil is the attractant that causes them to pick up the bait. The active ingredient differs from brand to brand. Some are insecticides and some are insect growth regulators (IGRs).

Adult RIFA cannot swallow solid food. They have to carry the granules back to the mound and feed them to their young. The larvae convert this solid food into liquid, which is then spread from ant to ant throughout the colony. The queen gets top priority for available food. Once she is fed the tainted food and dies the colony dies out.

IGRs prevent larval development, and the colony dies out as adult ants are not replaced as they die naturally. Since baits are not a contact insecticide, they have very few environmental hazards as long as they are stored and applied properly.

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Managing Red Imported Fire Ants

Mound treatments are used only at the mound, so the treatment will affect that mound only and not threaten native ants in the treatment area, even if they are in close proximity. Many mound treatments are granular contact insecticides. These should not be confused with baits. Because they contain a contact insecticide, they have a higher risk of environmental hazard.

The Texas Two-Step program uses a combination of broadcast bait and mound treatment. The broadcast bait is applied when ants are actively foraging. Two weeks after the broadcast application, mounds are examined. Any mound that remains active is treated with a mound treatment. A mound does not have to be free of all ants to be considered inactive. If the ants have been identified as RIFA, but are lethargic when disturbed, the indication is that the queen is dead. No further mound treatment is required; remaining workers will die out.

If you have decided to use a whole yard treatment, the first step is to make absolutely sure the product you select is a broadcast bait.

Mound treatment is the most effective option if only a few mounds are detected, or if you have decided to manage RIFA only in areas where people and pets are threatened by their presence. If you have decided to use a commercial mound treatment, follow all of the instructions on the package regarding application rates, timing, and whether to water the product in.

We have found that one of the fastest acting and most effective mound treatments is also one of the safest and most natural. The following treatment is safe for humans and pets and can be used any time of year and in any weather.

Orange Oil Mound Treatment Recipe

2-oz Orange oil concentrate (pure orange oil, not an orange oil cleaner)

2-oz Horticultural molasses

2-oz Liquid dish soap (do not use an anti-bacterial)

2-gal Water

Mix together in a bucket. Pour slowly around the perimeter of the mound then move in a concentric circle to the center. This amount will treat several small mounds, or two large mounds.

You will see dead ants around the mound in just a few hours. Usually one treatment is sufficient. Occasionally a second treatment is required a day or two later.

Orange oil concentrate is available at most independent garden centers, the organic section of home improvement stores, at feed stores, and online. Brands to look for are Medina and Gardenville.

The Orange Oil Mound Treatment will not harm plants. The treatment may be used right at the base of edible plants and fruit trees. Orange oil is a natural insecticide, fire ants dislike molasses and it is beneficial to soil organisms, the dish soap is a surfactant, and water is a carrier.

Orange oil and soap are irritating to earth worms. If you see earthworms squirming on the soil surface after a mound treatment, you can rinse them off with clean water and relocate them.



Photos by Keith Kridler

Left: Not very pretty but they don't leave much in the nest when they are done.

Right: Ants are cleaning the bones. Babies probably could have fledged but did not.



Helping to control RFIs is one contribution we can make to the care and conservation of birds.

TBS Friend and Photographer
David Kinneer
Shares Bluebird Photos





Hosting a booth at a local event is a favorite activity for our volunteers.

Harold Latham and crew set up this TBS booth at the Edgewood Festival.

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Katy Couvillion	Mary Munsinger
Linda Crum	Rex Reves
Travis Edwards	Meg Scamman
Judy Hetherington	David Smith
Judy Hutka	Ann Thames
Keith Kridler	Richard Thames
Harold Latham	Ron Tom
Don Lawrence	Pauline Tom
Don Mitchell	
Ellie Mosely	

Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

Robert and Linda Almes	Jim Cheatham	Mike Klotz	Leigh Sebera
Joe Anne Betts	Dawn Daniecki	C.Kriegel	Barbara Sieberhausen
Kathleen Blanchard	Tom DeKunder	John & Verna Lammers	David S. Smith
Fred Boecker	Mickey Dufilho	R.L. Langley	David & Edwina Thomas
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Welcome New Members! New members who gave us print permission

- Christina Abazajian • Willene Akin • Alex Antram • Joe Beard • Belinda Beek • Kathleen Blanchard
- Bob & Linda Boots • Mary Brandt • Jeff C Brown • Mary Brownlee • Rhonda Brunner
- Steven Burkhalter • Chandler Burnett • David Campbell • George Carnevale • Patricia Castillo
- Ivan A Cervantes • Sherman Clem • Gary & Melanie Clinton • James Douglas & Dolores Coleman
- Tish Coruidae • Brenda Covey • Jennifer Cross • Joe B Dorn • Dr. Walter Dyck • Melissa Elam
- Celia Ethridge • Johnny Fife • Dann Fisher • Bill Flowers • Johnny Francis • Sally Gaines
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They Didn't Read The Book



Many birding experts have spent countless hours observing bird behavior and creating absolutely wonderful guide books so we all know what we can expect to see. Well, obviously two pairs of birds didn't pay attention to the pages on proper nesting habits! Can you identify the nests and tell which birds are misbehaving?

Some of us have seen the bottom nest. Although the friendly and energetic House Wren has a wide range in North America, only a few nests have been reported in the Texas panhandle region. The House Wren builds their nest from twigs and sticks, often adding a spider web with eggs as a precaution against mites destroying the babies. No report is available, but we are going to assume it was a successful nesting attempt.

But, what about nest #2? Granted, the nestbox landlord should be helpful, cleaning out the box after each nesting. Was the Carolina Chickadee so anxious to use this particular nestbox they couldn't wait to claim it? Did she decide the twigs were a close substitute for her preference of sawdust in the bottom of the cavity? Her snug nest built of green moss, strips of bark and a thick layer of hair (including deer, opossum, or even human) or plant fibers, did the job for this nesting attempt.

We all know the top nest of course, it belongs to the beautiful Eastern Bluebird. This nestbox must be in a great location; used again without any interior alterations. The female makes her nest by loosely weaving together grasses and pine needles, then lining it with fine grasses and occasionally horse hair or turkey feathers. Although a nest built on top of another is more prone to mites, parasites, and the long arm of predators, we hope she had a successful nesting.

Great photo but not a unique situation. Give our feathered friends a hand by cleaning the box after each nesting.



A bluebird nest with 4 eggs was reported in mid-January. Have a few sunny days or artificial light confused your bluebirds? Please share your earliest nesting and results to editor@txblues.org. Photos if you got 'em! Be sure to enter your nesting data at nestwatch.org - every nest counts.

All cavity-nesting birds are protected by federal law. Do not disturb birds or nest. Report activity to NestWatch.

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