



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

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IN THIS NEWSLETTER ...

THE TEXAS BLUEBIRD SOCIETY HAS A NEW PRESIDENT ...
DOUG ROHDE! Read all about it!

Is an active Ash-Throated Flycatcher nest in three of seven nestboxes near Boerne unusual? We don't know ... yet. Learn about the tool that will soon be available IF you and other Texans with nestboxes lend a helping hand.

You'll see what LeAnn Sharp (owner of Frio Lodging, www.FrioLodging.com) has put together for the August 21st Bluebird Symposium in Concan*. She booked June Osborne as featured speaker and field trips leaders Mitch Heindel, Lee Haile, and Bain Walker.

The difference between egg dumping and nest sharing is found on Page 2 along with some other details related to unusual nestings.

Pauline Tom, Interim Editor

*** Where is Concan?** It's not in Mexico! It's in the southwest corner of the Hill Country in the beautiful "River Region".

- 8 miles south of Garner State Park.
- 23 miles north of Uvalde.
- 80 miles west of San Antonio.
- 100 miles southwest of Fredericksburg

On-line Season Summary Form Debuts SOON

please plan to enter your data

Our On-line Season Summary is in the final stages of testing. Please save your data so you can complete a summary when the feature is "live."

We hope to have data from many of the nestboxes in the TransTexas Nestbox Network. (If your nestbox is associated in any way with the Texas Bluebird Society, it is part of the TransTexas Nestbox Network.)

Any Texans may enter the data from their nestboxes. It is not necessary to be a member of the organization. We're seeking to gather as much data from Texas nestboxes as possible.

The form is styled after the data collection system of the NABS Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. All information collected will be shared with the North American Bluebird Society.

Those willing to keep and enter detailed records for each nestbox may wish to join The Birdhouse Network (TBN), a program of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. TBN offers a 20% discount to members of our organization.

June Osborne: Featured speaker for Summer Bluebird Symposium in Concan* and 2004 Convention

Texas Bluebird Society is honored that **June Osborne** will be the featured speaker for both 2004 TBS-sponsored events, the **Bluebird Symposium (August 21st, Concan)** and the **Convention (October 30th, Ding Dong)**.

June Osborne is a naturalist and freelance writer living in Waco, Texas. She was a columnist for the Waco Tribune-Herald and other local newspapers for several years. Presently, she is a regular contributor to WildBird magazine and serves on their Advisory Board. June has studied birds for almost thirty years both at home and abroad. She formerly taught bird identification classes, lectured, taught in birding Elderhostels in Concan, and guided bird tours. She has four books to her credit: The Cardinal and The Ruby-throated Hummingbird (both published by the University of Texas Press), I'd Rather Be Birding (Texas A&M University Press), and her self-published Birder's Guide to Concan, Texas (and Surrounding Area). I'd Rather Be Birding was chosen as a featured title in the prestigious Texas Book Festival held on the Texas State Capitol grounds in November 2003.

Concan, June's home away from home, is in the Texas Hill Country River Region on the western edge of the Hill Country. It's beside Utopia (www.utopianature.com gives the "flavor" of the area). It's not far from Garner State Park and Lost Maples State Park. The August 21st Symposium will make for a nice weekend getaway from many parts of the state.

Watch your mail for the Symposium Registration packet. It will be mailed from the "Texas Hill Country River Region Visitors and Convention Bureau." Information (including field trip details) and registration is also available at texasbluebirdsociety.org

BLUEBIRD FIDELITY

By Megan Miller

Boy meets Girl. Boy woos Girl. Boy and Girl start looking at real estate together.

With all the complicated situations humans can get into when it comes to romantic relationships, it's heart-warming to watch a pair of bluebirds becoming a simple happy couple. Since Victorian times, they have been the icon of sweet domestic bliss. But *are* they in fact a devoted couple?

Dedicated as he may be to protecting his nest from other males, the male bluebird is unconcerned by female visitors to the nest, though perhaps he should be. Females who have been unsuccessful in finding a nest site will attempt

to lay their eggs in another female's nest. This is known as "dumping." And there are also cases, rare but documented, of two females with two different clutches sharing a nest box. It remains to be studied whether these females tend to be mother/daughter pairs, siblings, or entirely unrelated to each other.

Here's where genetics step in - DNA testing by ornithologists is revealing a surprisingly high percentage of egg clutches where not all of the eggs are related to each other.

For years, we've thought bluebird home life was similar to that of Ozzie and Harriet's. It turns out that there's much more going on behind the nestbox door than we previously imagined.

SHARED NESTING

by
John M. Cys

Shared nesting is an unusual occurrence in the bird world. However, before discussing we need to distinguish it from two similar occurrences. Egg dumping is where females of a single species will lay their eggs in the nest of a female of the same species and abandon them. The nest owner not only must incubate and raise her babies but also those placed in her nest by the other females. Ducks are well-known for doing this. Nest parasitism is where a female of one species lays her eggs in the nest of a different species and abandons them. Again the host raises both broods. The Brown-headed Cowbird is the most common nest parasite in North America.

Shared nesting is where two females of the same or different species lay their eggs in the same nest and share incubation and subsequent family duties. The two females will either sit side by side or one on top of the other to incubate the eggs. In some instances they will take turns incubating the eggs. For a shared nest to be successful the nestlings of the two species should hatch approximately at the same time, be similar sized, and eat the same food. If these conditions are not met, one or both broods are doomed for failure. When American Robins and House Finches share a nest, the robin nestlings smother to death the much smaller House Finch nestlings.

There are scattered unpublished reports from bluebirders of two female bluebirds sharing the same nest. The rarity of shared nesting in Eastern Bluebirds is indicated in a published article which states that in South Carolina from 1977-1991 only 5 of 4,299 nesting attempts were shared nesting.

The Anis of Central America practice a special kind of nest sharing. Several females will lay eggs in a common nest and then all the birds will take regular turns incubating the eggs. The reasons for shared nests are little understood by scientists.



Thanks to Charles Post who coordinated a Texas Bluebird Society booth at the Big Thicket Birding Festival in Kountze (left) and the Liberty Jubilee (right).

(l) Jennifer & Johnny Fleming, Charles Post

(r) Charles Post, Dan Hanan



from the TransTexas Nestbox Network

"Snakes Alive"

Dan Hanan, Houston and Bastrop

"I have had a snake go up a ten foot telescoping pole and around an inverted five gallon bucket (my version of a snake trap) to get baby birds. The best thing that I have ever used is a greased, smooth conduit mounting pole. The grease (cheap chassis grease thinned with motor oil) also tells the "story" of snake attempts to climb the pole."

Mike Scarbrough, Azle

Mike reports that he found a venomous copperhead snake in one of the four nestboxes he placed at his in-laws. The snake had climbed a steel T-post that the box was mounted on and was inside the nestbox. The snake had consumed the young bluebirds.

Keith Kridler, Mount Pleasant

Keith found two snakes when he monitored nestboxes (he has hundreds of nestboxes on his trail) on June 5th. He explains that snakes are out in force in the South and that the rains and floods drive creatures to search for dry places to hide. He said he doesn't want to scare people. Rather, "Use a little caution when you go to open a nestbox or when you use your bare hand to cover the entrance hole.....Your fingers will look like they are edible to a snake waiting patiently inside for a bird to inspect your nestbox and become its next meal!"

Lysle Mockler, Waxahachie

A year ago "Texas Blues" included a photo of a snake going over a predator baffle to reach one of Lysle's nestboxes. Since mounting her nestboxes on longer EMT conduit and raising the Kingston Stovepipe Predator Baffle (from 8" stovepipe) to chest height, she has had no losses to snakes.

Plans for the baffle are located in the "Building Plans" section of our website. The baffle will not make a nestbox "snake proof;" it will make it much more difficult for a snake to reach a nestbox.

Cheryl Anderson, Azle

Cheryl Anderson came up with a new use for duct tape! When she found a snake in a nestbox in early June, she duct-taped the hole shut so her husband, J.C., could deal with the snake later.

"Pursuit of Happiness"

John Cys, Wichita Falls

The TimesRecordNews featured the Lake Arrowhead trail that John Cys monitors in an almost full-page story with color photos on Mother's Day. It opens with "What wise men say is true. Those who seek the bluebird of happiness need look no further than their own backyard."

Imagine John's delight when he recently found two clutches of white bluebird eggs on his trail! About 5% of bluebird eggs are white. (The last edition of "Texas Blues" featured a story that tells how the blue is "applied" to the eggs as they go through the oviduct.)

"More habitat for blues ready"

Walter O'Brien, Buda

Texas Bluebird Society has about 20 nestboxes available for special projects, thanks to Walt O'Brien. This new member picked up nestbox parts from our storage facility in Kyle and returned them as nestboxes. Thanks!

"Think BIG"

Ronny Rolf, Pittsburg

This new member found us when he was well along the way with his plans for a [500-nestbox bluebird trail](#) stretching from Winnsboro to Tyler, along the routes he travels as a Champion EMS paramedic. He adjusted his plans (scrapped nestboxes made with treated lumber) so the trail qualifies as a "Texas Bluebird Society Trail." On Mother's Day, he surprised his mother, Eloise Hall, by announcing that the trail is named for her.

The *Tyler Morning Telegraph* ran a large story with color photos in late May. TBS has new members as a result! Ronny says, "I would like to see the TBS reach 1000 members by the end of the year and I'm going to do all I can to help us get there."

Contact Ronny if you live in his area and can help by building nestboxes to specs, installation or monitoring during nesting season. Phone 903-767-0277 or e-mail rrolf@championems.com.

Welcome to the new president, Doug Rohde! I'm more than a little proud that Doug Rohde assumed the office of the presidency on May 1st. (I "picked him" as my successor long before he knew it!) Doug is so capable, with strengths different from my own. Doug has been a behind-the-scenes part of "my" leadership all along the way. I have been dependent upon Doug for wisdom, guidance, business sense, computer skills, wordsmithing, friendship and prayer support.

Quality permeates everything Doug touches. He will take this organization on to new heights with deeper roots with his unique set of experiences and skills. His leadership and communication skills are particularly needed at this stage in the organization's life when we need to develop a stronger leadership core.

Doug worked 32 years for ExxonMobil in engineering, computing and senior management. He and Karen, his wife of 35 years, have been "bluebirding" since they moved to Highland Village in 1996. He is an avid organic gardener, working for Texas Tech Soils & Sciences Department and Blooming Colors Nursery while he is working towards a degree in Horticulture.

My applause could not be any louder as my heart beats with pride over Doug and for our organization as I step into my new role.

Pauline Tom, Past President

President's Corner

Neither rain, nor lightning, nor thunder, nor hail will stop the mail? No, in this case it was Texas Bluebird Society at the annual Bluebird Festival at Wills Point. After a night of Texas style stormy weather and a morning of more of the same, many of the participants didn't even bother to set up their booths for the annual festival. NOT SO FOR TBS! We set up our tent twice in the wind and rain, the second time moving to a more sheltered location vacated by one of the no-shows. Then we spent an enjoyable morning talking mostly among ourselves while the rain continued. But finally around noon a glint of blue ... not our favorite winged variety, but actually blue sky. The afternoon turned beautiful and Festival attendees appeared, not in the throngs that good weather would have brought, but still a good crowd. The TBS booth was a buzz of activity, with "formal" presentations and lots of discussion and question answering. Best of all, the TBS ranks grew by almost 30 memberships! WELL DONE TBS volunteers and a special "attagirl" for our number one cheerleader, Pauline Tom.

Would you believe that our fledgling organization (sorry I couldn't help myself) has now grown to over 550 memberships? Since most of our memberships are of the household variety, that means our ranks are almost 1000! Not bad for less than 3 years of existence. As TBS President, Pauline Tom has been a driving force in this growth and words cannot nearly describe her contribution. As with any organization and particularly with a volunteer organization, it is critical that as the organization grows, the capacity to serve its membership must grow as well. An important piece of that is being good stewards of our volunteers' time and using the unique talents and skills that each possesses. At the TBS Board meeting on April 23, we elected officers. As a result, as of May 1, I have assumed the role of TBS President with Lamont Brown as Secretary/Treasurer. Pauline will continue to serve the organization as Immediate Past President, focusing on the NABS 2006 Convention and numerous other projects. It is the conviction of your TBS Board that these changes will position us to continue to grow and meet the needs of a growing membership.

In future editions I'll say more about our vision for TBS and how YOU can help.

Doug Rohde
Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

Cues for Blues in the News

Should you have an opportunity for "your" bluebirds to be featured in a newspaper article or on television, kindly ask that the journalist reference "for more information about bluebirds in Texas, visit texasbluebirdsociety.org."

Journalists seeking photos or quotes may contact the TBS for assistance (info@texasbluebirdsociety.org).

Please us send copies of bluebird articles from Texas to us!

***Watch for the Bluebird
Symposium Registration
Form in your mailbox.***

To:

"Texas Blues" is the bi-monthly publication of

**The Texas Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 40868
Austin TX 78704**

**www.texasbluebirdsociety.org
info@texasbluebirdsociety.org**

President, Doug Rohde 972.317.5500 (home)
president@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Secretary / Treasurer, Lamont Brown 940.891.4400
lamont@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Past President, Pauline Tom 512.268.5678 (home)
pauline@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Donations Needed for Auctions & Raffles

bluebird, bird and nature-related items & art
for

Bluebird Symposium, Annual Convention and
2006 NABS Convention

Ship items to our post office box. A receipt for tax purposes will be issued.

Auction Coordinator Needed to oversee the large NABS (North American Bluebird Society) Convention 2006 auction and raffle. Contact Pauline Tom,

A sneak preview!

*A registration packet with lodging options will be mailed to members soon!
The registration form and lodging options will also be on our website.*



2004 Bluebird Symposium
plus field trips in the Texas Hill Country River Region
Saturday August 21, 2004 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. — Concan, Texas
House Pasture Cattle Company Restaurant, Uvalde County Road #348
For Everyone Interested in Birds ... and bats



Friday Aug. 20- **Social Time & Preregistration** – 4 to 7 p.m.

Saturday, Aug 21, 9:00 - 5:00

Featured speaker, June Osborne

Talks on bluebirds, other cavity-nesting birds, and bats;
Open discussion; Fajita Lunch; Silent Auction; Book Signing, Social Hour

9 Optional Field Trips (*space is limited on most trips*)

Friday Aug. 20 - 12:30 to 4 p.m. – **‘Nature by Kayak on Frio River’**- \$25.00 each
Guides Lee Haile & Bain Walker - Participants Must Sign Kayak Rental Waiver, wear the provided life jacket & secure shoes;
Must be in fair shape & in good health. Participants will meet at House Pasture Parking Lot at 12:30pm.

Friday Aug. 20 - 7:30pm to Dark – **‘Sunset Bat Flight Tour’** \$8.00 each
Saturday, Aug. 21 - 7:30 p.m. to Dark \$8.00 each
***Guide Bain Walker** – Lifetime Experience! Watch 10 Million Bats Fly out of Frio Cave at Sunset, while Hawks try to catch them.
Participants will meet at Bat Tour Gate on FM 2690 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday Aug. 21 / Sunday Aug 22 – 7 to 9 a.m.- **‘Bluebird Nestbox Trail Tour’** Free Tour
Sunday, Aug. 22 – 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. Free Tour
(Established Bluebird Trail since 1985.) Participants will meet at Bluebird Hill Home at 7 a.m.

Saturday Aug. 21 – 7 to 9 a.m. – **‘Birding By Chair with June Osborne’** \$4.00 each
Sunday, Aug. 22 – 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. \$8.00 each
Participants meet at Rio Frio Lodging Home/Office at 7 a.m.

Sunday Aug. 22 -7:30 to 11:30 a.m. – **‘Lost Maples Nature Walk with Mitch Heindel’** \$8.00 each
Enjoy learning about the birds, butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, lizards & other critters in Lost Maples State Natural Area.
Participants will meet Guide Mitch Heindel (who led Audubon tours for 14 years) at Lost Maples Park Office at 7:30 a.m.

Sunday Aug. 22, 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. – **‘Big Tree Tour’** \$8.00 each
***Guides Lee Haile & Bain Walker**. See Five National & State Champion Trees, Plus The Biggest Tree in Texas!
Participants will meet at Garner State Park Office Parking Area at 8 a.m.

\$3 off Early Bird Symposium Registration by 8-14-04 Fees: *TBS Member - \$10 * Non-Member - \$15
Noon Buffet - Chicken & Beef Fajitas, Rice, Salad - **\$12** — We recommend the Buffet; No other restaurants nearby
Neal’s Café is another suggestion for evening meals before the Bat Tour (Local restaurants close at 9 p.m.)

*For Questions, to Volunteer or For Donations Call Coordinator,
LeAnn Sharp at 830-966-2320 or email LeAnn@texasbluebirdsociety.org*

For Area Lodging Visit www.thcrr.com Make Reservations in Advance!
For Additional Birding Sites and Local Nature Photos visit www.utopianature.com