



TEXAS Blues

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

Volume 6

Issue 1



NestWatch, a continent-wide citizen-science project and nest-monitoring scheme, opened in mid-April as a pilot project! NestWatch is funded by the National Science Foundation and developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO) in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

TBS gained permission from CLO to promote and use NestWatch before the "official" opening in 2008. And, our Board voted to encourage Texas Bluebird Society Members and other Texans to submit nesting data for the past, present and foreseeable future at
www.nestwatch.org

Forms are available on the website; and, we've included a starter form in this newsletter.

Annual Meeting Site Changed!

McKinney Falls State Park Dining Hall will be the gathering spot for our Annual Meeting on Friday, October 5th. Mark your calendar now and enjoy a meal, speaker, silent auction, and camaraderie.

The name sounds familiar. The park's name is similar to the location listed in our last newsletter, so please note the change. We opted for this more casual option because the rental fee is \$80/day, rather than several hundred dollars.

TBS has camp sites reserved at the park (for tent camping or RV's.) It's less than two miles from the spot on the grounds of Texas Parks & Wildlife in Austin where we'll set up our red, white & blue canopy earlier in the day, for the TP&W EXPO on Saturday and Sunday.

To claim a TBS-reserved spot for camping, contact Pauline Tom (ptom5678@gmail.com or 512.268.5678.)

A-Plus



For TBS:
Join
NABS
for
\$15.00
through
"A-Plus"
offer

TBS is an "affiliate" of the North American Bluebird Society. We received this notice from Brian Swanson, NABS 1st Vice President (Affiliate Relations.)

In NABS' continuing effort to align NABS closer with our affiliates, the NABS Board is extending a discounted membership offer to Texas Bluebird Society members.

The "A-Plus" offer applies not only to affiliate members who are joining NABS for the first time but also to renewals and extensions. It runs from 1/1/2007 to 12/31/2008, and reduces NABS membership to \$15.00 per year for both single and household memberships. This is a reduction from \$20.00 for single membership and \$30.00 for household.

Detailed information and an online membership form can be found at www.nabluebirdsociety.org/APlus (This URL must be typed in because this is not a public offer.) Your members who don't have internet access can send their new, renewal, or extension to NABS, P.O. Box 43, Miamiville, OH 45147, with a notation that the special rate applies.

We know that they will enjoy getting the "Bluebird" if they aren't already receiving it. *Brian Swanson*

from the E-box

in this issue, get an inbox look at a few communications from members and inquirers

January 24, 2007

In Abilene we are seeing all three bluebird species this winter, Mountain, Western and Eastern. On the CBC, we had a flock of 43 Eastern Bluebirds at Dyess AFB; at the end of the day we tallied 71 EABL and 68 Western Bluebirds overall. So Abilene is taking good care of someone's bluebirds. I hate to see them go back home but am also excited to see how many easterns stick around to nest here. We added more nestboxes at Dyess and I now have 40 boxes to monitor. *Laura Packer, Abilene*

*lgpacker@cox.net
www.bigcountryaudubon.org*



Laura will share about her bluebird trail at Dyess Air Force Base during our 2007 Bluebird Symposium in Wichita Falls on August 18th. She took this photo of a Mountain Bluebird at Dyess AFB on Valentine's Day.

January 26, 2007

Hi folks,

Just wanted to say thank you for your great website. In early January I built two nestboxes (TB-1C) and put them up in our back yard. The plans are excellent. We had seen bluebirds off and on for the year and a half we have been here on our rural Caddo Mills 2 acres. Last week we were thrilled to see them investigating both boxes. This morning they were entering them and hopefully will nest.

Thanks again. You've done a great job with the information and your web site is among the best organized I've seen. *Bruce and Beverly Frantz*

April 5, 2007

Hi Texas Bluebird Society,

Just a quick note about our bluebirds. Although we told you they investigated the boxes in late Jan., they didn't start building their nest until early March. Late last week, she had 5 beautiful blue eggs. We have thoroughly enjoyed watching their behavior and the male is always around, catching insects (crane flies on our window screens) and chasing off other birds including sparrows and a redwing blackbird (both parents did that).

So thanks again to TBS for getting us started. We are addicted to bluebirds now! *Bruce & Beverly Frantz, Caddo Mills*

February 23, 2007

We place Bluebird boxes on metal fences sometimes. Is it OK to place a little Tanglefoot around the contact interfaces between the metal post and the Bluebird box to keep fire ants at bay? What about using it where the boxes are placed on wood fence posts or barbed wire? (The Tanglefoot would be placed mostly around the back side of the boxes.)

What do you recommend to use to keep wasps from building nests in the boxes?

*Rob Iski
Outdoor Recreation Planner
Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge*

Hi Rob,

It "feels good" to hear from a relationship established at the National Bird Education Conference in early February! Thank you for contacting TBS.

Indeed, Tanglefoot is the most effective fire ant deterrent. Care must be taken to apply it only where birds will not come in contact with the substance.

On metal conduit, I normally put about a 1/2" ring of Tanglefoot about 24" above ground.

It must be "renewed" after intense rains and after many insects/ants are trapped.

An added benefit with Tanglefoot is that you'll be able to "track" whether snakes have accessed the nestbox and know to take extra steps to deter them.

Rub the interior roof of your nestboxes with a bar of Ivory soap to make it more difficult for wasp nests to adhere.
Pauline Tom, President

Board Member, LeAnn Sharp, reminds, "TBS advises pole-mounting, rather than fence-mounting, to make nestboxes less susceptible to predation."

From a March 6, 2007 letter that TBS Member, Barb Ohlman, wrote to Heritage Church of Christ in Keller

It is my pleasure to inform you that on February 21, two bluebird nestboxes were installed on the church property. They are located northeast of the building along the property line. Approximately 500 feet exist between the two boxes.

The Texas Bluebird Society and myself want to thank you for allowing us to use your land for this worthwhile endeavor. As you may know, bluebird habitat is disappearing before our eyes on a daily basis. Hopefully, a pair of bluebirds will be nesting this season or next.

I will be monitoring the boxes on a weekly basis to determine any results and to prevent possible predators

Here's a series of notes from Paul Nelson, who (like Bruce Frantz) met TBS through nestbox plans on our website. Read to the end to see how he took going out on a limb with mealworm feeding to new heights!

February 12, 2007

I recently built a bluebird house using the instructions on your website. I am very excited about contributing to the conservation of the beautiful eastern bluebird. I am so enthused about this new venture.

I recently saw a bluebird in my yard. I've lived in Texas my whole life (28 years--21 years in the Dallas area) and never saw a bluebird. It was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.

My mom then researched bluebirds in Texas (we had no idea they were even here) and came across your website detailing how to build a home for them. We had it done by the end of the week! *Paul Nelson*

TBS thanked him for his note and invited him to join.

February 17, 2007

I tell ya, I'm getting a little discouraged. Bluebirds come around (just saw two some yesterday), but they don't seem to be interested in my backyard. I've set-up my nestbox and food for them, but the furthest they come is on my fence for a brief time before they fly away. (He told how he changed the orientation of the nestbox.) s of!). Anyway, I put dried mealworms with some "bluebird nuggets" in a bowl on a stool about 15 ft behind the nestbox. They've been sitting there for a while untouched. Any idea why? Is it just a matter of finding the food? Is there any way to make the nestbox more attractive? Are they less-likely to nest in a backyard compared to a golfcourse? Also, I didnt get the nestbox up until Feb 10. Was I too late? I keep an eye out every day. The thought of having a family move in is amazing...almost too good to be truly possible. I'm trying though. Let me know if you have any other tips.

Anyway, thanks for getting back to me! I appreciate it and plan on becoming a member. I'm thinking that I may be able to approach the golfcourse owner next to my home at the end of the year to discuss a bluebird trail.
Paul Nelson

Paul, I hate to have to tell you this ... but some people wait for years before their nestbox attracts a bluebird pair. And, some never do.

You might be able to attract bluebirds to your yard (since you're seeing them) by putting out live mealworms. thenaturesway.com is one of the mealworm distributors that gives support to the Texas Bluebird Society and the North American Bluebird Society. (NABS members receive a 15% discount on mealworms.)

The bluebirds do not need the mealworms. People "need" the mealworms in order to see the bluebirds up close.

In Texas, where bluebirds have live insects year-round, they're not likely to eat dried mealworms.

It's a bit early for the bluebirds to select a nesting cavity. Mid-March will be much more likely. ... You might turn the hole towards an open area with a tree/bush within "flying distance" for the little fledgling bluebirds. ... It'll be a good idea to approach the golf course ... "Today" is always a good day to install a nestbox :-) *Pauline Tom, President*

March 28, 2007

I'll have you know that I have finally gotten the bluebirds to establish my backyard as a resource for food! They are officially coming frequently to eat mealworms! It's unbelievably exciting! I had put out mealworms trying to attract them before, and they all died within a week of no bluebirds! I stayed focused and encouraged. While reading another website someone recommended to put the mealworms within 5 ft from their favorite perch site. Well, at my house, their favorite perch site is my TV antenna! So I climbed up on my roof and thumb tacked an empty milk jug bottom under the antenna! Guess, what? In 5 minutes, a pair showed up and the female began eating! The next day, they found two containers I placed in my backyard! Today, they returned every 10-15 minutes to munch! How awesome! Still no bluebirds in the nestbox, but we'll see. Maybe next year. *Paul Nelson, new TBS member*

I am using greased, 4" diameter PVC pipe on about 2/3 of my nestboxes and so far, a snake has not defeated the greased PVC. They have left body tracks in the grease as high as 24 to 30 inches, but not any higher. In the past over a period of several years, the snakes have always climbed over my snake guards; I hope this time, they are not successful. In the past, I have had snakes climb 3/4" and 1" diameter greased steel emt. I think the reasons the greased PVC is successful is: (1) the PVC is a smooth, slick surface; and, (2) after the snake has used a few loops of his body around the pipe to get grip on the pipe, he does not have enough body left to go up the pipe.

I buy the cheapest grease gun grease that I can find, put it in a gallon can, and dilute it with new or used motor oil.

I wait to apply the grease until an egg has been laid in the nest. After two to four months when the grease gets stiff and is not slippery on the PVC, I recoat the pipe.

After the nesting season is over and before autumn, I will wipe the grease off of the pipe with an old cloth soaked in a solvent or detergent. The winter rains will wash the pipe clean of remaining grease. The cleaning steps have prevented the grease from hardening during winter and from becoming a surface that snake can "get a grip on" during the next year.

The greased PVC pipe requires ongoing maintenance.
Dan Hanan. Houston and Bastrop

2007 TBS Calendar

Saturday, June 9th

Texas Blueberry Festival, Nacogdoches *

To volunteer to work our booth, contact Norm Shoemaker, sales@thriftryrubberstamp.com or 936-569-0480. This will be our first year at this festival. We're also a sponsor, which gives us a link on www.texasblueberrylfestival.com !

Saturday, August 18th

Bluebird Symposium, Camp Chaparral, Wichita Falls

Bluebird Bob Walshaw. Also, Denise Townsend and Laura Packer. Early morning nature walk led by local birders. Option at 11 a.m. of a tasting at Wichita Falls Winery, just down the street or a presentation on bats with live bats! .Silent Auction. For details or to donate an auction item, contact John Cys, 940.691.5702.

Friday, October 5th

TBS Annual Dinner & Auction *

McKinney Roughs Dining Hall (Austin)

Our annual meeting will be in conjunction with the Texas Parks & Wildlife EXPO. Participants may plan to visit the 2-day event and volunteer under the red, white & blue Texas Bluebird Society canopy.

Saturday, October 6th & Sunday, October 7th

Texas Parks & Wildlife EXPO (Austin) *

To volunteer to work our booth, contact Ann Thames. semahta@yahoo.com or 979.278.3053. About 40,000 visit this festival!

"One Nestbox" membership_nestbox exchange will be offered at all events. New members (and renewals) will receive a complimentary nestbox.

Below: TBS' trademark "One Nestbox" membership_nestbox exchange at the **Bryan Earth Day Festival**, April 21st. TBS says, "WELCOME!" to 43 who joined that day. Kudos to David Gwin who seized the opportunity for TBS and sent 1,000 emails inviting locals to visit the booth. "Welcome" also to those who joined at the **Wills Point Bluebird Festival** and thanks to TBS volunteers: Norm Shoemaker, Harry Evans and Barb Ohlman.



Texas Bluebird Society

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"Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time"

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*This newsletter of Texas Bluebird Society
is published 4 - 5 times a year*

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