

TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter May 2016 • Volume 15. Issue 2

VANESSA VOISINETT THE FACE BEHIND FACEBOOK



If you haven't "Liked" the TBS Facebook page, you are missing great stories and photos from fellow members and other contributors! Our thanks to volunteer Vanessa Voisinet, who has devoted her spare time to ensuring our page is a fun place to visit!

Vanessa monitors the page so the material is always valid and bird related, no messy ads or junk on our site! She also answers questions, with a little help from our board, from our members and visitors, posts TBS news and conservation tips, as well as participating as a contributor with her own photos and comments.

THANK YOU VANESSA FOR A GREAT FACEBOOK PAGE!

Your constant attention to our social media venue is appreciated!



Left; Mrs. Looking so pretty on her nest. Hopefully all our sweet Blues are handling all the bad storms ok. Stay safe beautiful blues. Mom started her incubation of brood # 2 today.
Mike Western 4.30.16



Above: Her first brood fledged on Sunday and here we are Tuesday and she is already checking out nest boxes.
David Kinneer 4.26.16



Left: 4.25.16 Lori Perrotta Mullicab

3 Baby Blues hatched today! Hoping for the remaining 2 eggs to hatch soon. This is very exciting news for me, especially since this is their 2nd attempt (1st attempt was 4 dud eggs that they eventually abandoned after 25 days of incubation.) Love bluebirds!

Bluebirds Right On Track In 2015

By **Robin Bailey**
NestWatch Project Leader

Nestwatchers often ask, "Was it a good year for bluebirds?" Answering questions like this would not be possible without the power of citizen science. Thanks to thousands of NestWatchers throughout the years, we were able to use more than 85,000 nest records to compare trends for all three species of bluebird across their ranges.

We are happy to report that in 2015, each species' reported nesting success (the percentage of nests that edged at least one offspring) was slightly above its long-term average. In the graphs that follow, the dashed line represents the 19-year-average of nesting success (1997– 2015). Good or bad years will be above or below the dashed line, while normal years will be near it. Fortunately for the bluebirds, 2015 was a good year for all.

Eastern Bluebirds, champions of consistency

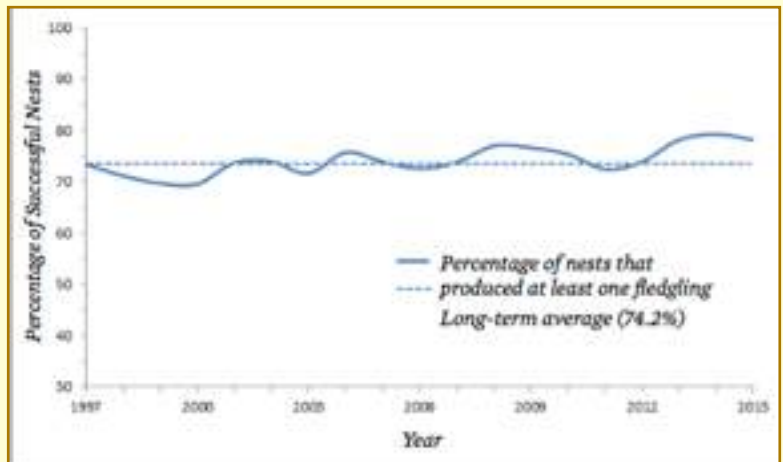
2015: 78.4% of nest attempts were successful

Long-term average: 74.2%

(95% condence interval: 72.9– 75.4 75.4%)

Conclusion: An above-average year

Although a smaller percentage of Eastern Bluebird nests edge off- spring than other species of bluebirds, nesting success rates have been the least variable from year to year for this bluebird species. In 2015, nest- ing success was 78.4%, about 4% higher than the long-term average and well above the 95% condence interval. A whopping 56,228 nests with known outcomes were used for this analysis.



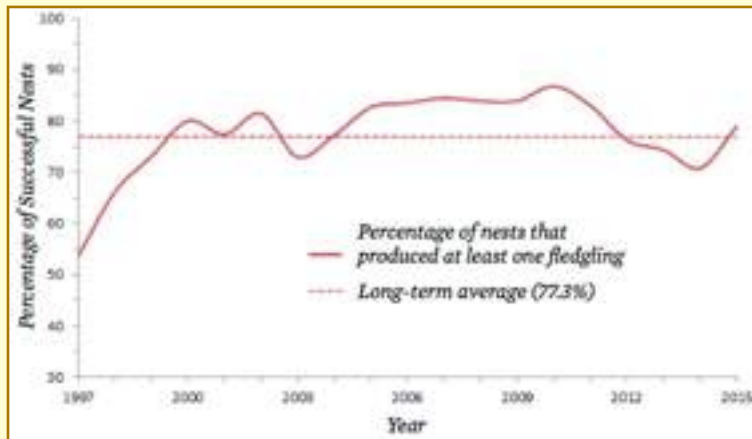
Western Bluebirds, hot and cold

2015: 78.8% of nest attempts were successful

Long-term average: 77.3% (95% confidence interval: 73.8=80.0%)

Conclusion: An average year, but still very good

Western Bluebirds have experienced the second highest rate of nesting success of the three bluebird species with an average of 77.3% of nests edging at least one offspring. Western Bluebirds, however, have been the most variable in terms of their nesting success, with higher peaks and lower valleys. Nesting success was 78.8% in 2015, which is just a hair above average for the species. An amazing 21,099 nests with known outcomes were used for this analysis.



2015 TX NestWatch Report

Species	Total # nesting attempts	Total # fledglings	Average # fledglings
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	2	9	4.5
Purple Martin	10	5	1.7
Barn Swallow	27	35	3.5
Cliff Swallow	1		
Carolina Chickadee	80	194	4.1
Tufted Titmouse	26	85	4.0
Black-crested Titmouse	79	172	3.6
Brown-headed Nuthatch	1	4	4.0
House Wren	4	6	3.0
Carolina Wren	60	146	3.6
Bewick's Wren	108	283	4.6
Eastern Bluebird	705	1451	3.0
Western Bluebird	8	4	2.0
American Robin	2	3	1.5
Northern Mockingbird	13	9	1.8
European Starling	4	5	5.0
Cedar Waxwing	1	4	4.0
Prothonotary Warbler	2	4	4.0
Cassin's Sparrow	1		
Field Sparrow	6	5	5.0
Lark Sparrow	1		
Northern Cardinal	7	6	2.0
House Finch	10	17	2.1
Purple Finch	3		
Lesser Goldfinch	2	0	0.0
House Sparrow	40	39	2.6



Musings from the Master ~

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.

Keith Shares His Thoughts On Moving Active Nestboxes

Question: "We've had bluebirds around our little hacienda since the end of January. Initially, the small group of five BB's seemed to be a family carried over from the last brood of the 2015 season...?"

Their number has been gradually shrinking, until over the last two weeks, there has been two left, a male and a female. Over the past week, she built a complete nest using materials that we provided. (dry grasses and dry white pine needles). The site would be vigorously defended against would-be intruders, by the ever-present male.

We noticed that the pair were absent yesterday afternoon and evening. Their continuing absence this morning was a real cause for concern. (We've been without Bluebirds for the past two seasons)

Early this afternoon, a pair of Bluebirds flew in and zeroed-in on another nestbox on our property. The female appeared to be a newcomer, noticeably different than the previous female. The newcomer female immediately began placing nesting materials in the newly selected box. The male, was no longer defending the existing completed nest...??? Are they newcomers...?? What suddenly happened to the first pair...? What will happen to the existing newly completed nest...? Should I remove it..?

The two nestboxes are not 60 feet apart. The box containing the completed nest is the larger, more secure, of the two and has been successfully used by BB's in the past. The second box is smaller and usually occupied by Tree Swallows.

Should we remove the recently completed nest, and hope that the new pair will take the more desirable box...?? Let nature take it's course...? I'd be interested in any comments or advice."

Response: Family groups of Eastern Bluebirds tend to break up in late winter early spring as longer days, higher protein diets trigger breeding hormones to build up. The dominant male bluebird will drive off the other males as egg laying time grows near. Females, daughters from the year before will be tolerated in the group longer than the son's will be allowed to stay.

Once the dominant female begins to build nests then even the other females will spread out and begin to follow one or more males around.

I would not remove the active nest of an Eastern Bluebird for the fear that they would believe that a "Predator" removed the nest. Very often in bluebirds moving and or removing a nest will trigger the female to abandon that territory and they will leave as a pair and go off and find other nesting boxes. Many bluebirds are raised in backyard boxes and are more used to humans being around. They see us monitors as blind two legged "cows". We humans are so blind and so slow we never even see their young or eggs, even when we open up their nesting boxes on a daily basis. IF you have a human that goes out and messes up their nests and or removes their nests and or throws rocks at them as they perch in their yards that is different. That pair will move off and find another set of "blind, slow moving humans to live with.

To keep from having bluebirds using "sub-standard" nesting boxes and or boxes that are possibly more accessible to predators, it would be better to remove and or make these safer before nesting season starts. I often experiment with various boxes, that are "gifted to me" but then I use these as scientific research. Yes you can confirm that a LOT of styles of popular nesting boxes are "sub-standard" and or they are not worth the extra effort to make these. I live in Mt. Pleasant, Texas where I currently have three pairs of bluebirds with eggs and or young all within 250 feet of my house.

Native Elderberry Plant Attracts A Variety Of Birds (And People Like It Too!)

By **Linda Crum**

Master Naturalist and Master Gardener



Elderberries are popular for their use in jams, jellies and pies. They are occasionally used in winemaking. Only blue or purple berries are edible. The red berries of other species are toxic. Elderberries contain more potassium

and phosphorus than any other fruit. And also contains more vitamin C per unit weight than oranges or tomatoes. The fragrant flower cluster can be dipped in batter and fried or the petals added to pancake batter, eaten raw or made into a tasty tea.

Gardeners often consider the plant too common for their garden. But Elderberry has great wildlife value. Over 50 species of birds, including bluebirds, feast on the berries. Mammals will also eat the berries and deer will browse on the twigs and leaves.

Elderberries grow best in moist, fertile, well-drained soil with an acid pH between 5.5 and 6.5. They do not tolerate poor drainage – it's a myth that elderberry prefers swampy areas. I have seen them growing in ditches but suspect that they are growing on the edge of the ditch. Space the plants six to 10 feet apart. The plants are shallow-rooted and should be mulched well to maintain soil moisture. Cultivate carefully around the roots when controlling weeds. Part shade is the preferred habitat and the plant will require more moisture when grown in sunny areas.

A loose, graceful, deciduous shrub, elderberry will grow 6-12 feet in height and put up many new, long canes from the base of the plant each year. The

shrub should be pruned heavily in winter by removing old and broken canes to maintain a thick form. The leaves are pinnately compound with paired leaflets opposite on the stem. Clusters of fragrant, white flowers appear in May and June. Berries are ripe when purple to black in July or August. Unripe berries are considered toxic.



Propagation is easiest from seed. However, the seed have a hard coating and need to be scarified before planting. Hardwood cuttings from previous season's growth can be used but have a lower survival success.

Elderberry is generally free of pests which makes it a great choice for the landscape. And who can argue with wine as a possibility from the fruit?



A great addition for both you and the birds in your backyard garden.

The Blue Feather award is given to a member in recognition of the countless hours of extraordinary service for tasks assigned or self initiated with superb and gracious team support.

Annual Blue Feather Award Shared With Husband And Wife Team

Keith and Selena Schindler

In the half-year between 2015 Symposium and 2016 Kickoff, Keith and Selena Schindler shouldered heavy weights for Texas Bluebird Society, filling critical gaps. The Board did not want to wait until 2017 Season Kickoff to recognize their magnificent service to Texas Bluebird Society.

Most notably, when Beverly Davis had to take a leave of absence with a critically ill pet, it was the day before the Season Kickoff flier went to print. With a phone call, the Schindlers agreed to have their name added to the 2016 Season Kickoff flier as "Auction Inventory Coordinators"! The mailing schedule proceeded as planned because of their commitment to a major role.

They received and logged each shipped donation and made a



trip to Conroe to pick up the donations Beverly already had on hand.

Keith even added photos of auction items to webpage 2016event.txblues.org. Already, Keith had created the event webpage and taken the position of Assistant Webmaster, a job for which we previously paid an hourly stipend. We went

months without an Assistant Webmaster, so Keith had a lot of "catch up" to do while training under our webmaster, Clyde Camp.

The Schindlers have faithfully donated auction items through the years and served as silent auction volunteers.

Keith also takes photographs of our events. In fact, someone had to grab Keith's camera so that he could join Selena in accepting the award and we'd have a photograph. To present the award, we had to pull Selena away from auction close-out in the next room. Back to work she went as soon as she left the stage.

You are appreciated!

Congratulations Keith and Selena

TBS Honors David Kinneer With Honorary Lifetime Membership



Congratulations to **David Kinneer**, Honorary Lifetime Member in TBS. David is "our photographer friend in 'Virginia' to whom we are tremendously indebted. Recently, Texas Bluebird Society selected Dave as a recipient of our (very rare) Honorary Lifetime Membership.

David's photos are often featured in TX Blues. In fact the March issue contained a page devoted to David's beautiful photographs. In case you are new and have not seen the prior issue, here is an example of why we all enjoy David's talent with a camera. Thanks for sharing such a unique moment!

David is a frequent contributor on Facebook. Enjoy his, and many other members, who share photos, stories, questions, comments and special moments of their bluebird adventures.

2016 Annual Season Kickoff Workshop Held In Bastrop

TBS now holds just one annual event, the Season Kickoff Workshop, held in early spring to help members get prepared for the new bluebird breeding season. Great speakers, informative exhibits and publications, lots of membership networking, our awesome Silent Auction FUNdraiser, and another special Friday night social. Just a few facts: Attendance was 100+, the Silent Auction raised \$3,441 to be used for materials and supplies to build the hundreds of nestboxes needed each year to carry out the TBS mission. The photos below share the events of the day. ***Plan ahead! Next year's Season Kickoff event will be held March 24, 2017 at Waco Convention Center.***



After Dinner Speaker, John Karger and his assistant, presented *Last Chance Forever (with raptors)*. A wonderful treat for the Friday night social.

2016 Season Kickoff Presentations:

- Jane Tillman: Bluebird Basics
- Alec Wyatt: Project NestWatch and Nestbox Monitoring
- Jane Tillman: Bluebird Gardening
- David Pitts: What Bluebirds Do At Night
- Linda Crum: House Sparrows: No Easy Solution
- David Pitts: Chickadee Nesting Ecology: Nest Early, Nest Once
- David Pitts: The Hummingbirds That Nest In Our Yards
- Alec Wyatt: Bluebirds And Wildfires: Black Forest, Bastrop, And Beyond



Volunteers are APPRECIATED!

Sue Arcy	Kenlyn Lawrence
Phyl Baloga	Ellie Mosley
Mike Barrett	Kenny Munoz
Beth Becker	Lisa Munoz
Karla Blakey	Pat Nail
Linda Crum	Roland Nail
Kay Dansby	Kevin Nelson
Bev Davis	Paul Nelson
Walter Davis	Judy Ray
Jim Estes	Ken Ray
Miriam Hall	Rex Reves
Marianna Hobbs	Kelly Russell Nelson
Kathy Kirk	Keith Schindler
Benni Konvicka	Selena Schindler
Jimmie Konvicka	Norm Shoemaker
Ronnie Lanier	Pauline Tom
Harold Latham	Ron Tom
Kathy Latham	Judy Turner
Don Lawrence	Vanessa Voisinet

Many hands make the work go faster!
Volunteers (L-R) **Jim Estes, Karla Blakely, Kenny Munoz, Judy Turner, and Mike Barrett**



Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

Bob & Pat O. Allen	Joe Gibson	Marsha McLaughlin	Gomer & Sharon Stover
John Askins	Judy Goodman	Pat & Glenn Merkord	David & Edwina Thomas
Bastrop Co. Audubon Society	Dawn Hanson	James & Sharon Miggans	Jane & Mark Lyon Tillman
Susan Baumann	Colleen Heinsohn	Lisa L Munoz	Phyllis & Ben Tobias
Janis Bedford	Karen Henderson	Billie Murrell	Glenn & Gwenda Vinkler
A. Best	Joannie Hensley	Peake, Katherine	Peter Walsh
Ruth Carlson	Beth Hogan	Nancy Podio	Amy & Jon Watkins
Regina Cox	David & Ora Keetley	Jimmie Lee Putnam	Diane Webb
Scott Darnell	Florence H. King	Woody & Patricia Raine	Leigh Weld
Beverly Davis	John & Tamarr Knapp	Dave Redden	Dr. Thomas M. Wheeler
Heather Deatherage	Jimmy & Benni Konvicka	Della Richhart	Judy Worthy
Ann Dietert	Diane Kramer	Mona Rigdon	
Joe Dimarco	Ethel Kutac	Mary Lou Rizzo	
Chuck Emerson	Don Lawrence	Linda Ross	
Randy Garst	Patti & Bill Marshall	Lynell Soltys	

Welcome New Members!

New members who give us print permission on Membership Form

• Bob & Pat Allen	• Joel Clinkscales	• Linda Grant	• Sara Law	• Debbie Oliver	• Sarah Smith
• Carolyn Anderson	• Michael & Susan Cole	• Sari Grant	• Wendy Jo Ledbetter	• Melanie Pavlas	• Karla Smith
• Mary Anderson	• Karen Collier	• Rhonda & David Grounds	• Cathy Lewis	• Nancy Person	• Richard Sopp
• Sarah Anderson	• Gary & Gloria Colvin	• Lucinda Hamilton	• Sandra Lewis	• Bonnie Peterson	• Nancy Starey
• Richard & Sally Arnett	• Regina Cox	• Mark Harris	• Helon Loep	• Phil J Pollan	• Sondra Stewart
• Mana Bailey	• Julie Kay Cox	• Haywood Harris	• Davina Long	• Al Prescott	• Gomer & Sharon Stover
• Ken & Dottie Bateman	• Jeffrey Cuellar	• Colleen Heinsohn	• Alexa Lopez	• Lori Prewitt	• Cindy Sullivan
• Susan Baumann	• Pat Curry	• Kate & Abby Heinselman	• Cameron & Stacy Lowery	• Susan Prewitt	• Jane Sussdorf
• Janis Bedford	• Jim Daniel	• Cindy Henderson	• Beth Martin	• Megan Pulido	• Billie Allwhite Szydlo
• Shirley Bennett	• Joy Danna	• James Henry	• Maria Martinez	• Jimmie Lee Putnam	• Karen G Taylor
• John & Karolyn Berhow	• Heather Deatherage	• Joannie Hensley	• Belinda Masterson	• Cindy Raimond	• Lisa Tuck
• Melissa Berry	• Ann Dietert	• Kay Hepler	• Van Matthew	• Elisabeth Redwine	• Cameron Turner
• Sara Nell Bible	• Joe Dimarco	• Beth Hogan	• Marian Maynard	• Kerrie Richert	• Janice Upright
• James P Blasé	• Jarah Dubcak	• Stacey Huber	• Matt McClain	• Andrew Robinson	• Barbara Vander Weele
• Bruce Blevins	• Robert & Gina Eakins	• Ed Hueske	• JoAnne McElroy	• William Robinson	• Beth VanDeventer
• Kent Bohls	• Barbara Edwards	• Michael Humphrey	• Robert McEwin	• Terry Rooney	• Margaret Wagner
• Michael Bowling	• Joyce Elliott	• Joyce Jack	• Michael D McGee	• Deborah Rose	• Dena Wagner
• Mary Ellen Branan	• Dean & Bebe Ellsworth	• Priscilla Jarvis	• Barbara McLaughlin	• Robert & Shelia Sammons	• Steve & Debra Wallace
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• Shirley Bynum	• Sue Franks	• Starrett D Keele	• Vanessa Morris	• Gayle Shannon	• Lori Whitworth
• Ray Camp	• Lynne Rue Fryhoff	• Shahthureen Khan	• Arlene Moseley	• Lois Sharpe	• Elizabeth Witzig
• Yolanda Canales	• Sandy Gabbert	• Mary Kievit	• Omar Motolinia	• Robert Shaw	• Bryan Woolaro
• Lonnie & Letitia Castleman	• Kenneth "Joe" Gibson	• Kathy Kitowski	• James R Nelson	• Kimberly K. Shaw	• Alec Wyatt
• Glenda Chadwick	• Judy Goodman	• Diane Kramer	• Kristy Newman	• Fronie Shelton	
• Amy Longspaugh	• Lisa Gowan	• Bridget Langdale		• Delaina Sims	



Adult male

- Small thrush with round head, fairly small bill
- Blue throat and brilliant, deep-blue upperparts
- Many but not all males have rusty-red shoulder/back

Western Bluebirds (WEBL)

In open parklands of the American West, brilliant blue-and-rust Western Bluebirds sit on low perches and swoop lightly to the ground to catch insects.

Deep blue, rusty, and white, males are considerably brighter than the gray-brown, blue-tinged females. This small thrush nests in holes in trees or nest boxes and often gathers in small flocks to feed on insects or berries, giving their quiet, chortling calls.

WEBLs may sing in full darkness (called a dawn chorus) during the beginning of breeding season. Predawn singing stops shortly after hatching of the second brood.

WEBLs are located in the Davis and Guadalupe Mountains in west TX. Photos by John Park.



Adult female

- Small thrush with round head, fairly small bill
- Gray throat and belly
- Blue tinges in wings and tail
- Chestnut wash across breast

These birds are highly social, and usually feed in flocks during the non-breeding season. They hunt for terrestrial insects by dropping to the ground from a low perch. Western Bluebirds also frequently feed on berries in trees. Western Bluebirds rely on trees both for nesting cavities and hunting perches, and also perch on fences and utility lines.



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Linda Crum: Membership Secretary

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*All cavity-nesting birds are protected by federal law.
Do not disturb birds or nest.
Monitor and report activity to NestWatch.*

The Texas Bluebird Society newsletter, *TX Blues*, is published four times a year: March ■ May ■ July ■ October
Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor
Send stories/photos to editor@txblues.org

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