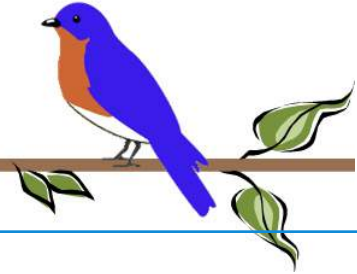


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter • March 2018 • Volume 17. Issue 1

President Pauline Tom's State Of The Organization

Another year passed, and we've grown ... "one nestbox at a time". The 2017 chapter in the Texas Bluebird Society is remarkably similar to previous years. Our cumulative numbers certainly get larger.

At a recent lunch, the man sitting next to me leaned over. "Excuse me, did you say 'over 6,000?'" It's hard to believe. At year-end, we hit Membership #**6,288**, each one a household membership. Many of these (you?) installed their first nestbox under the influence of Texas Bluebird Society.

Each edition of "**Texas Blues**" goes to over **1,000 current memberships**. 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.**

Each year, our IRS 990 is posted in the About Us section of our website. **Year after year, our bank balance gets larger** as we continue to give away nestboxes to new members face-to-face, sell nestboxes at a wholesale price, give away dozens of nestboxes to members who pledge to NestWatch at least two nestboxes at the NestWatch signup station at our annual event, and provide major underwriting for the TBS event.

At this point (this is simple arithmetic, adding 1,000 nestboxes to the 2016 sum), our certified nestbox builders have constructed **over 15,000 "official" nestboxes**. Countless more have been built under our influence, by members and those who download our free nestbox plans from our website

Roughly one-third of our 2017 expenditures related to "nestboxes", following plans made by the Board. Such expenses include cedar and other supplies for building including jigs, cost of nestbox builder training, renting storage for over 1,000 nestboxes, and nestbox dispersal (for instance, registration fees for festival booths.)

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

Our FUNdraising Silent Auction (at annual event) items are obtained from donations by members, registrants, and purchases with earmarked dollars for "Auction Purchases". **100% of the proceeds from the FUNdraiser (and every donated dollar during the entire year, over and above annual dues) purchases cedar** for volunteer-built nestboxes.

Volunteers do the work of the organization. **Every member is a volunteer**, as we all work together to spread "Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time. You make a difference, just by installing a nestbox. You make a difference for science, beyond Texas' borders, if you report your nesting observations to NestWatch.org.

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. The newsletter editor is a volunteer, as are the writers.

Several past Board Members continue with their primary responsibility and serve on our (non-voting) "Advisory Board".

Five Certified Nestbox Builders, with the help of local groups, construct our "official" nestboxes to precise specifications.

Festival Booth Anchors, assisted by others, give TBS a presence at several festivals each year. *Consider volunteering to anchor or help staff a booth.*

Over two dozen Nestbox Distributors sell memberships and nestboxes. *See a map of network on our website.*

Five of us work on the EventPlans Team, attend over 40 meetings (via GoToMeeting) in preparation for the Annual Event. *Several are weary and worn. This is "fun" that we want to give to others. Will you come alongside us as we plan the August 3, 2019 Event, perhaps taking the reins or the FUNdraising Auction?*

Update: Vice-President Lonnie Castleman determined by mid-year that he cannot move into the presidency. He went back to work part-time and has plans to travel extensively. **We need new blood and /or a new business plan.** Contact execs@tx.

Bluebird Memories

By Susie Johnson

Bill's work took us many places where we have enjoyed watching birds and providing feeders and water. In 1987, we moved to Arkansas. The first time I saw a group of beautiful bluebirds at my window I was hooked! The Eastern Bluebird was the most beautiful bird I had ever seen. The birds were seeing their reflections in my windows and that allowed me to have a perfect close up view.

Soon we had nest boxes placed in all the wrong locations. These had no success with any nest building. We soon joined the North American Bluebird Society and began to educate ourselves about bluebirds and proper nest box locations. After our frequent moves, placing nest boxes at our new home was a high priority, right along with furniture arrangement!

In 1989, we moved to a home on the Brazos River and spring brought heavy rains with flooding. We had placed a nest box in the back yard and it was quickly occupied by a pair of bluebirds which nested and laid eggs. Unfortunately, when the river rose past flood stage, the box was completely covered by the river. The saddest thing ever was to see the distraught pair of bluebirds circling the waters above their nest. Bill hung another nest box on a tree on higher ground near the house. Although this was not the ideal location, the birds immediately moved in and successfully raised a brood.

In 1993, we built a house on five acres so we were able to establish a 5 box trail on our own property. We became "official" bluebird monitors, reporting results to Nestwatch. We also became purple martin monitors and had a great colony with two large martin houses and some gourds. It was a wonderful experience having bluebirds on our own property and frequently seeing them at our bird bath right outside my kitchen window.

At a Texas Bluebird Society seminar in 2012 we met Jim Marshall. He told us of a bluebird trail which had been established by Boy Scouts and which needed monitoring. We happily agreed to monitor the 15 boxes at the Pecan Valley Golf Course in Benbrook. The boxes had been constructed of plywood and they quickly deteriorated in one season so we and Jim Marshall replaced them with Texas Bluebird Society boxes.

One day, while monitoring our nest boxes at Pecan Valley, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers Lead Park Ranger at Benbrook Lake, Terry Schmidt, stopped to introduce himself and to chat. He told us he had nest boxes at the lake and asked whether we would like to monitor those boxes. So in 2015 we started monitoring the 10 boxes at the project headquarters office and at the Dutch Branch Day Use Area. Since then the number has increased to 18. This winter our box maintenance will include painting the boxes white and adding predator guards to the opening to try to reduce the number of broods lost to raccoon predation.

We now monitor a total of 32 nest boxes and report the results to Nestwatch. As we monitor, both at the golf course and at the lake, people often stop to tell us how much they enjoy seeing the bluebirds. Bluebirds are new to some of the people but others tell us of their past experience with bluebirds. One day we met a serious wildlife photographer parked near one of our boxes. He had been there for two hours watching and photographing the pair of "our" bluebirds visiting the nest. He got some beautiful shots and was thrilled to see the eggs in the nest when he accompanied us as we monitored the nest.

It is a great pleasure to be able to assist one of God's most beautiful creatures to thrive and reproduce. They bring joy to everyone who sees them, again earning their name of "bluebird of happiness!"



Photo by **Greg Lavaty**

Attracting Bluebirds To My Ranch

I own 195 acres located in Central Texas about 12 miles northeast of Goldthwaite, in Mills County. I maintain a wildlife exemption on my ranch with the County Tax Assessor. The exemption requires me to declare and execute year after year a wildlife plan. My 2018 wildlife plan was accepted earlier this week. One of the activities I have enjoyed the most since 2015 is what is called "Supplemental Shelter". This brought me to the Bluebird Society in 2015. Since my beginning, knowing absolutely nothing about cavity nesters I have learned a great deal.

I have 15 nestboxes deployed on the 195 acre ranch. When I first set them up I was a bit new and wanted to nest any species that would use my nest boxes. During my first season I had Tufted Titmouse, Bewick's Wren and Eastern Bluebird nests, they reared several clutches and then the little ones fledged. I was actually able to witness a clutch of young bluebirds fledge. It was one of the high points of my young birding career. It was equally exciting to see all the bird life inhabit my boxes.



Moving nestboxes to new locations

Seeing bluebird eggs gave me a real rush. Their nests are very neat and the eggs are a beautiful pale blue. The eggs usually number anywhere between 4 to 5, and most hatch to very beautiful fledglings. Every time I see the eggs I get really excited to the point I can feel my heart pounding! The bluebirds will have several clutches and I have even seen babies hatch in late July. Bluebirds are very industrious and seem to have a intense drive to raise young ones.

Therefore despite the fact that I have had hit or miss wren and titmouse nestings I recently relocated approximately 50% of my nest boxes to areas that are more conducive to bluebird nesting. My plan was to relocate the nest boxes from heavy brush areas to more open areas. I placed them within 100 feet of a landing site for the fledglings, looking away from the west and prevailing winds, and 100 feet from dense brush. All nest boxes are about 100 yards apart. My place is large enough with diverse landscape and elevation to support this endeavor. My son Chris Irwin assisted me in relocating the boxes. The pictures included depict some of the relocated areas.



Nestboxes now in open locations

In closing my goal is to encourage more bluebird nestings, but all cavity-nesters will always be welcome. Hopefully, I will be able to report the results of my 2018 Bluebird season! I am really pumped to see the first Bluebird eggs!

UPDATE! I visited my nest boxes on Saturday Feb. 17, 2018. I found 3 nestboxes out of 15 with nest evidence. All 3 had EABL nest evidence with 2, 3, 0 eggs respectively.



First egg this year

Articles and photos by **Thomas Irwin**.

Tom joined TBS in 2015 to learn more about bluebirds and incorporate the appropriate methods to deliver water, food, and shelter in his land management programs. Tom will be sharing his nesting successes as well as tips and techniques he is using to enhance his environment to attract birds and other wildlife to his ranch.

A Festival And A Resolution

I hope everyone's year is taking off to a great start! As I sit and think about what I'm going to write, I'm reminded of my New Year's resolution: lose weight. This has been my resolution for the past couple of years though. I always add "volunteer more" to my list because I love to stay involved, especially for bluebirds. So, I'm tempted to encourage you all to make 2018 your year where you volunteer more, but I won't. Instead I hope to offer up a different idea...

This past fall I became a Harvey victim. Up until the time we had to evacuate, I was feeding mealworms and seeds to my birds and filling up all my hummingbird feeders to prep my birdies for the sudden shock of landscape change/shock from migrating around a hurricane. As a matter of fact, my husband yelled for me to stop worrying about the birds and get my "you know what" in the car IMMEDIATELY with our kid, 2 dogs, cat, and some items I could not part with, as police rounded up the last of us to leave before the neighborhood went completely underwater. So, for the majority of last fall, I was pretty down in the dumps. But then Pauline Tom contacted me about a volunteer opportunity to spread the love and knowledge of bluebirds to the Rosenberg community. I needed that task to get me back to normal.

In November, I, with a couple of TBS volunteers/coordinators including Ron Tom and Shirley Hrobar, volunteered to host a booth at Rosenberg's Texas Prairie Heritage Festival at Seabourne Creek Nature Park. It



was an incredible and unique volunteer experience I will never forget. Master Naturalists from the Houston area invited groups, like TBS, the opportunity to educate the public about various aspects of nature with our own booth, educational material, and hands on visual examples for the public to get an up close experience. We had an array of pamphlets and pictures, and, of course, we had all of our nest boxes displayed and available for purchase. While the Festival probably only had around 100 people come by for the day, we got several new members and had a blast talking to little kids, seniors, and everyone in between about our love of bluebirds and how to care for them. On our lunch breaks, we even got to check out the other booths near-by ours: (to name a few) beekeeping exhibit, butterfly exhibit, edible wild plants, wildlife rehab organizations for injured animals (yes, I pet a couple of

snakes, an opossum, and an owl), Texas history reenactors who volunteer at George Ranch, etc. It was just so much fun!

But what does this have to do with my New Year's resolution suggestion? Well, it has to do with Ron Tom. Not only was the Festival wonderful to volunteer for, but it was even better getting to work with him and the ladies. In particular, Ron Tom reminded me how important it is to network with people. Birding is an easy hobby for the true introvert. I absolutely love the time I take to monitor bluebirds (and other birds) in quiet and solitude. Observe, report, and learn. But, conservation work asks for more than that. It's not just about educating the public about our passion, it's about learning from others too. You never know how the naturalist you just made friends with might help you think about birding in a different way? Maybe the community member you just sold a nest box to works for the city and is looking for ways to strengthen city efforts towards conservation? I had a few moments observing Ron Tom find some connection with almost everyone who dropped by our booth, and those individuals left feeling more enthusiastic and





connected to what we love to do because of it. If you ask him, he'll tell you that I kind of teased him about it. But, I honestly was in awe of this talent.

So for 2018, I encourage you all to network more. It doesn't have to be TBS related necessarily, but since this is a TBS article, maybe think about going to Convention this year and meet your board members, maybe check out your local Audubon lectures and hikes coming up and meet those activists/enthusiasts, maybe look into becoming a naturalist and bounce your ideas off of other naturalists for making your community better for birding. Talk to your neighbors. I know mine ALL know about my love of bluebirds after we took turns demoing each other's houses to rebuild, and now I know what each of them also does for work. That particular example hasn't helped me with my birding efforts yet, but you never know who you'll meet and how it might change your life or, at least, change your way of thinking/doing. In turn, people are gaining something by meeting you and getting to know you and what you love. So, all in all, it isn't just about the work involved with volunteering our time towards bluebird

education/conservation, it's about making those connections with your friends and neighbors to develop a mutual appreciation for our passion.

Article/photos by **Kate Moran**

Kate and her family moved from Virginia to Sugarland in 2016. She loves birds and immediately joined TBS. In addition to her many activities to promote bluebird conservation practices, she has become a regular contributor to *Texas Blues*.

Nestboxes For Black-crested Titmouse Study at TX State

Ron and Pauline Tom recently met Rebekah Rylander (doctoral student) at our Kyle storage location to transfer dozens of nestboxes. TBS donated 10 nestboxes and Texas State purchased the remainder.

Rebekah summarized her doctoral research: In a nutshell, I study family flocking dynamics of the black-crested titmouse (BCTI). During my master's work, I discovered that BCTI tend to form kin-structured neighborhoods over time.

The formation of these neighborhoods comes from the limited dispersal of (usually) the heaviest male nestling, which remain in their natal territories until the following spring. The son then sets up his own breeding territory that often parallels or overlaps his father's. In rare occurrences, the son completely foregoes breeding and becomes a helper at his parents' new nest.

My current PhD work is looking at these family flocking dynamics in an urban population of BCTI, as well as expanding our understanding of these social flocks at the Freeman Center (hence why we need more nest boxes.

TBS is happy to assist with Rebekah's research.

At our request, Rebekah will be reporting her nesting activities to NestWatch, then shared with scientists around the globe for their bird-related research projects.



Ron Tom helps Rebekah Rylander load nestboxes for her doctoral study.

New Member Adapting To TX

A bit of background...I lived my entire adult life on Long Island. Close to me was a power cut. One day I was hiking in there and found the remnants of a blue bird trail that had been erected by some foundation many years ago. It was in poor condition and yet, there was one pair of blue birds in one of the dilapidated houses. I began to learn about bb's and trails, maintaining them, etc.

My father loved bb's. That winter, he died of complications due to parkinson's. In his memory, (known only to me), I resurrected and maintained the trail with new houses, which successfully housed quite a few broods. I'm an avid nature photographer - here are some of my favs of my little blue friends from that trail. [Visit my website.](#)



Then we moved to Texas to be nearer our only child. Our land is under the ag exemption 1-d-1 and while we are putting up a house and will live there soon, most of it will be maintained for the benefit of wildlife and putting up a trail fits in perfectly. We cleared a bunch of cedar (but there is plenty left) and the grasses are returning as well as a bunch of other plants that I do not have identified as of yet, being new here. I do not plan to remove any native plants and won't be putting any new ones in that are not native to Texas. I have a lot to learn.

I would love to join the society and put up some houses. We will be out of the country until 10/1. When I get back I'll contact you about buying some houses, and maybe you can point me in the right direction to get some good baffles.

Article/photos by **Grace Scalzo** (Grace joined TBS in November.)



Our First Bluebirds!

My husband and I met you at The Arbor Gate in Tomball, TX when we went to hear Linda Crum speak about blue birds.

This beautiful female blue bird holding pine needles in her beak as she gets ready to enter her non-traditional, but very functional, nestbox.



We joined the TX Bluebird Society and look forward to learning a lot more about bluebirds which we did not have in Boerne, TX where we lived for 19 years.

We plan to mount the new "TX ready" nestbox we received that day. Hoping for many bluebirds this season.

Mary Lou Sims

9 out of 10 bluebirds surveyed prefer the TX style nestbox during the long hot summers!



- Extra wide roof for shade
 - Wide vents for better air flow
 - Interior corners for drainage
 - Easy lift side panel for viewing
- Go to txblues.org to find a nestbox distributor or nestbox building plans.

Send your stories/photos to editor@txblues.org

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Contact Us:

tbs@txblues.org,
PO Box 40868
Austin, TX 78704
512-268-5678 (Pauline Tom)

Moved?

Send email/address changes
to records@txblues.org

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

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Jerald Mowery

Kenny Munoz

Lisa Munoz

Roland Nail

Pat Nail

Paul Nelson

Tom OHM

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Shannon Ramsey

Judy Ray

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Vanessa Voisenet

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Call 512-268-5678

Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

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Brian Pinto

Debbie Roberts

Grace Scalzo

Laura Short

Mark Stanfill DVM

David & Edwina Thomas

Robert & Vanessa Voisenet

Amy & Jon Watkins

Wild Bird Center, Lakeway

Janice Wilkinson

Welcome New Members!

- Nancy V Angell
- Paul/Janet Barnett
- John Barton
- Bill Bartush
- Jody Beaver
- Deanna Brown
- P J Burkett
- Allen Burwell
- Barbara Cauble
- Johnny Chancellor
- Terry R Corbell
- Steven Costello
- John Cox
- Sondra Creighton
- James Cribbs
- Barbara Crystal
- Valeska Danielak
- Amy Daniels
- John W Davenport
- Nancy Davis 06283
- Walter A Dube
- Cheryl Dybvig
- Bill Elliott
- Michael J Elliott
- Kevin C Engelhardt
- Russ/Debra English
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- Herb Foelber
- Lorraine Fries

- Larry/Miriam Fulton
- Sandra/Gary Gober
- Patrick Gomes
- Rosalind Gosney
- Tracy Graham
- Russell Graham
- Kim Hansard
- Kay Hardy
- Arlene Harper
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- Dana Haynes
- Justine Henley
- Michael/Janice Hill
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- Sylvia Holler
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- Brenda Hynes
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- Ellen Watkins
- Stacey Watson
- Elizabeth Whitley
- Dorothy Wiggs
 - Wild Bird Center of Lakeway

**New members who give us permission to print their names: plus 47 other new members*

Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time



Every Egg Counts!



nestwatch.org

Bluebirds Enjoy The Feeder When Snow Is All Around!

Viki Rudd snapped this photo on January 16th in Nacogdoches, TX



Like the Rest Of Us - Bluebirds Appreciate Sunshine Too!

David Kineer shared this photo from Virginia on January 19th.

Visit the TBS Facebook page to enjoy other photos and stories from our members!



Federal law protects all native nesting birds!

- Do not disturb birds or collect nests/eggs.
- 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

