



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

Volume 1 issue 1

February March 2002

Welcome to the first issue of *Texas Blues*, the newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society. This newsletter is just one of the ways members can share information and experiences, with tips for beginners, instructions on building and mounting nestboxes, and upcoming events, to name just a few items. Future issues will feature landscaping for birds and wildlife, unusual sightings, issues specific to Texas and end-of-season trail reports.

You can also expect to see more information on constructing and modifying nestboxes to make them more suited for our Texas heat, and how to protect them from predators.

As a member of Texas Bluebird Society, *Texas Blues* is YOUR newsletter. To make it even better, we invite your comments and suggestions. Please let us know about upcoming events in your area related to bluebirds and other cavity nesters. Let us know if you see something unusual—a larger number of a species than in the past, or a species not common to your area—so we can see our progress throughout the state. Let's all work together for Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time.

Send communication regarding *Texas Blues* to editor Mark Klym, mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us.

Kate Oswald, Secretary

DID YOU KNOW...

Nearly 60 species of North American birds use cavities during the breeding season.

We usually think of woodpeckers who excavate cavities for their nest sites in accommodating trees. Many other birds are secondary nesters and rely on finding abandoned woodpecker holes or natural cavities for their nest sites.

Chickadees, titmouse, nuthatches, some flycatchers, some ducks and most owls fit this category as do **ALL THREE SPECIES OF BLUEBIRDS!**

No matter what habitat you live in, you can give a cavity-nester a place to raise a family. A nestbox often makes a great cavity.

NEW HORNSBY BEND BLUEBIRD TRAIL IN AUSTIN!

A new bluebird project began in January at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Treatment Facility in Austin. The multi-phased project will be headed by TBS in cooperation with Travis Audubon and the Center for Environmental Research.

Phase 1 will include replacing the weatherworn nestboxes already on-site. These will be placed more advantageously for the bluebirds and monitored by a team from TBS and Audubon.

Eventually an entire network of nestboxes (for bluebirds and other cavity-nesters) will be placed throughout the property and an educational kiosk will be erected.

Anyone interested in working on the project is welcome to contact Marj Swies at msweis@yahoo.com

In the early 1900's Eastern Bluebirds were found nesting on the island of Bermuda. Since there were few natural cavities the bluebirds' favorite nest site consisted of taking over used robin nests in the forks of trees and using this as a base for their own nest. A predatory species nearly eliminated the small population until, in the 1980's when nestboxes were installed across the island and today most bluebirds have returned to being "cavity" nesters.

President's Corner – by Pauline Tom

Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time

What a great motto! It was created as the new Texas Bluebird Society board members brainstormed around a picnic table under oak trees in my backyard in October. The phrase clearly expresses what this North American Bluebird Society affiliate is working towards and how we will accomplish the task.

Between the phrases is the unspoken key – people. People who care about effective bluebird conservation. People who will build nestboxes. People who will install nestboxes. People who will monitor nestboxes. People who will provide their professional skill (for starters, we need an attorney and a CPA). People who will give of themselves and their resources to be a part of increasing the bluebird population. Each participant makes a difference.

Texas Bluebird Society affords opportunity for bluebirders to share successes and failures with one another. From this we'll be inspired and educated ... and more monitored, hot weather resistant, well-ventilated nestboxes will be installed which will result in more bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds (i.e., any bird that fits through a 1.5" hole EXCEPT the imported House Sparrow which must not be allowed to nest).

And, as more people see bluebirds they will be touched by their beauty. We'll have the opportunity to encourage them to be a part of effective bluebird conservation. Bluebirds will multiply. We will be closer to our goal of bluebirds across Texas.

Try something new in 2002 to be more effective! Tried and true (by a successful few) “beat the heat” Texas techniques include adding a second or larger roof, drastically increasing ventilation, and placing nestboxes in shade of a large tree. Another trick is painting or stapling black circles on each side of a nestbox to increase chance that birds will be attracted to a “hole”. Think beyond what has been written about bluebirds by those with experience in other states. Think outside the box.

As we think in the huge picture “across Texas”, the vision of bluebirds will extend beyond each member's current boundaries. Establishing bluebirds across Texas requires that we think bigger than our backyards – perhaps by going a quarter-mile farther than before.

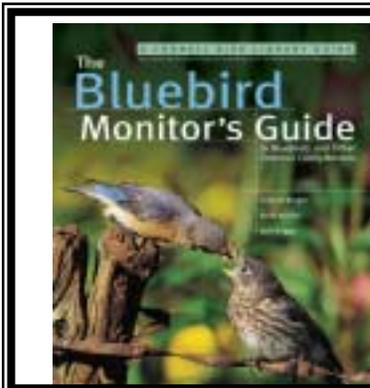
Perhaps you will commit to installing at least one more nestbox on the perimeter of the area where you now have bluebirds or an area that is suitable for bluebirds as a step in expanding pockets of bluebird populations throughout Texas.

by Pauline Tom

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“Something special happens when people meet bluebirds. As most of you know, it is a profoundly positive experience that brings out the best in people. ... Our work may not change the world, but it will make a difference.”

(Doug LeVasseur, President of NABS, Winter 2002 edition of Bluebirds)



Keith Kridler, co-author of *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*, is Vice-President of TBS.

Order your copy of *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide* through the Texas Bluebird Society's online store

www.texasbluebirdsociety.org

A portion of the cost supports bluebird conservation

CHOOSING A NESTBOX

Bluebirds will nest in many different styles of nestboxes. Unfortunately most nestboxes are designed for the northern states and will not protect the nesting birds from the high summer temperatures encountered in Texas. In some areas of the state, bluebirds will begin laying eggs in late February and can continue raising broods of young through August and into September.

Nestboxes used in the southern states need to be made from lumber that is at least 3/4" thick. The roof should overhang the sides of the box by 2" and the front by 3" to provide some shade and protection from rain blowing in the entrance hole or ventilation slots. If the nestbox is placed in the shade, roof overhang becomes less critical.

For ventilation there should be 1/2" gaps between the top of the sides and the roof on at least two sides. The box needs to be painted or stained a very light color to prevent direct sunshine from over-heating the nestbox. Young birds or eggs cannot survive very long if their body temperatures exceed 107* F.

For bluebirds nesting in Texas, the entrance hole needs to be 1-1/2" round and no larger than 1-9/16" round if you wish to attract the Ash Throated or Great Crested Flycatchers. Any larger and the European Starling may enter and evict the native cavity nesters. The native birds do not need a perch under the entrance hole; in fact, a perch may give non-native competitors an advantage.

The floor of the nestbox should be between 20 and 30 square inches to allow room for large broods of young to spread out as they mature. The boxes can be made with 5" X 5" square floors or rectangular like 4" X 5-1/2". The floor should have four 3/8" round drainage holes drilled in it or have the corners cut off about 1/2" in case water enters the nestbox, and to add ventilation.

Since the box needs to be monitored throughout the nesting season choose or build a nestbox that has a side panel or roof that will open easily but can be fastened to protect against predators. You should remove old nests as soon as the young fledge to help reduce nest parasites like lice and mites. A box that opens from the side is easier to clean while top opening boxes are easier to observe the nesting process.

Nestboxes should be at least 6" deep measured from the top of the floor to the bottom of the entrance hole to make it harder for predators to reach in and pull out eggs or young birds.

White pine shelving grade lumber makes excellent nestboxes as will weathered cedar fence boards. Exterior grade 3/4" plywood will make good oversized nestbox roofs. Avoid using pressure treated lumber for the nestbox as the chemicals used in this process might adversely affect the young birds.

Most "store bought" nestboxes are lacking in ventilation and roof overhang. Drilling extra 3/4" ventilation holes to equal the area of the 1/2" ventilation gaps or carefully trimming off more of the sides can easily modify nestboxes for our hot summers. A larger extra "double" roof can be added to the nestbox to provide the needed overhang. Place 3/4" thick spacers between the original roof and the new double layer as this will increase the cooling effect on the nestbox.

by Keith Kridler

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Kaufman's Boy Scout Troop 332 Assists Texas Bluebird Society and Texas Parks and Wildlife in building a Bluebird Trail

On the weekend of December 15th, 2001 Kaufman's Boy Scout Troop 332 erected 21 bluebird boxes at the new Lake Tawakoni State Park near Wills Point, Texas.

The Boy Scouts built the "NABS style" boxes from BN-1 Nest Box plans (found on TBS web site). To deter predators, the boxes were mounted on a 6-foot piece of 3/4" EMT conduit and slipped over a 4-foot piece of 5/8" rebar that was partially pounded into the ground. As a safeguard against attacks by raccoons and snakes, a Kingston baffle was added.

A total of 12 Boy Scouts and 9 adult leaders finished the trail in the pouring rain. Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) president Pauline Tom and her husband Ron also camped with the Boy Scouts that weekend. It rained between 9" and 13" that weekend in Hunt County. Needless to say, everyone was very soggy.

The park hosts Curtis and Carolyn Crowder have volunteered to monitor the boxes during the nesting season. TBS board member David Shiels will work with them at the beginning of the 2002-nesting season until they become comfortable with the responsibility of maintaining the trail. David and his Boy Scout troop will also be available to the park during the rest of the year to make repairs or consult with park personnel concerning any questions.

The head Park Ranger and manager of the park, Doc Watson, is thrilled to have a bluebird trail at his new park that will be located so near the Bluebird Capital of Texas, Wills Point, Texas. Doc Watson and the Crowder's have expressed much enthusiasm with having the trail and have identified both Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and Mountain Bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) at the park.

Boy Scout Troop 332 is headed by R. David Shiels. Troop 332 meets at St. Ann Catholic Church in Kaufman, Texas.

by David Shiels

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North American Bluebird Society Convention
Proudly celebrating 25 years of bluebird conservation
Penticton, British Columbia
June 13-16, 2002

Lakeside Resort Conference Centre & Casino
in the beautiful Okanagan Valley
with some of the most unique ecosystems in Canada.

Go to www.nabluebirdsociety.org for more information

Texas Bluebird Society Spring Event

April 19 - 21, 2002

Sulphur Springs / Wills Point

Best Western Sulphur Springs, Host
800.980.2378

lodging discount available if reservation is made by
March 21st, mention Texas Bluebird Society

- field trips to Cooper Lake State Park (wildflowers & birds), Wills Point (Annual Bluebird Festival), Lake Tawakoni State Park (TBS Bluebird Trail)
- seminars, presentations, questions & answers
- slides, in-nestbox video, displays
- informal Saturday evening supper
- opportunities to talk with other Texans who enjoy bluebirds

Registration begins in February. Form will be sent to members and available on www.texasbluebirdsociety.org

BLUEBIRD HOUSE DAY

FEBRUARY 9, 2002 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

MAXEY HOUSE STATE HISTORIC SITE

PARIS, TEXAS

Call 903-785-5716 for reservations

Led by Judy Brummet

Participants include Kate Oschwald & Keith Kridler

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Plan to attend TBS Spring Event, April 19 – 21, 2002