

TEXAS Blues

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

November 2005

You can help TBS!

TBS administrative tasks; NABS 2006 preparation and presentation

- This bi-monthly (approximately) newsletter needs an **editor**. Board Members and others will furnish photos and articles for "Texas Blues". We need someone to plan each issue and "put it together". Circumstances changed in the life of Mary Leyendecker whose beautiful work we enjoyed for a year.
- "Texas Blues" needs photos, articles, observations and other material. Send to editor@texasbluebirdsociety.org or to our P. O. Box (marked "ATTN: Editor".)
- Monitor and manage TBS' on-line Message Board. Remove inappropriate (SPAM) posts and delete users who post SPAM. Add group members to private forums (i.e., Board Forum).
- Assist TBS Webmaster by making updates to our website, www.texasbluebirdsociety.org.
- Provide newsletter notifications for our members who accept an email notification (involves a newsletter software program).
- Serve as Website Editor. Monitor TBS website to keep it updated. Write copy and provide updates to the TBS Assistant Webmaster.
- Sell raffle tickets for Texas Star Mohair Coat (\$5.00 ea. or 3 for \$10.00) to raise funds for NABS 2006 Convention. Order tickets from LeAnn Sharp. Return payments, completed stubs, and leftover raffle tickets by the deadline LeAnn sets.
- Assist the NABS 2006 Registrar by making contacts with those who select an already-closed field trip. Must be comfortable with Excel and databases.
- Solicit NABS 2006 sponsorships. To get started, request sponsorship brochures (or instructions for email) and provide a list of companies you will contact. Our Sponsorship Chair is Mindy Mitchell. sponsors@NABS2006.com or P. O. Box .369, Azle TX 76098.
- Provide color laser copy service
- Donate in-kind item(s) for NABS 2006 Convention (see insert).
- Donate item(s) for the NABS 2006 auctions (see insert).
- Solicit items for the NABS 2006 auction (this is as easy as asking you local "national chain" restaurant for a gift certificate; we'll provide a request on letterhead with tax info).
- Obtain quotes for NABS 2006 convention lapel pin and other promotional items.



Bluebirding in Tyler County, A personal story

by Thomas M. Wheeler, M.D.

I can't remember exactly when I got started, but it was sometime in the middle to late 90s. I learned the basics from my father-in-law at the time, at his farm just outside Groveton (Trinity County), TX. Following his example, I built the first few, but then resorted to buying ready-made ones at one of the large hardware stores or WalMart. I put these boxes up at my acreage in Tyler County, about 8 miles east of Woodville, TX. I didn't keep records for the handful of boxes the first couple of years or so, but as I increased the number, I had to keep written records to keep track of the boxes, as I only visited them on the average of 1-2 weekends/month. It was during these early years that I read a few basic books about bluebirding. The first written records that I made date to 1999, and I have continued yearly until the present, 2005. My property was mostly woodlands, so I was forced to place most of the boxes next to adjacent properties with pastures along the roads and/or utility easements. My preferred method of mounting was on a six foot metal pole with a predator guard consisting of metal stove pipe with hardware cloth at the top. However, as I had the urge to put up more boxes at an increasing distance from my property, this was no longer practical and I resorted to placing the boxes on telephone poles next to suitable foraging areas. I have learned to place each box on the eastern side of the telephone pole, to avoid overheating late in the season due to the afternoon sun. In 1999, all of my boxes were within a half mile of each other, but in 2005, I had to drive (either by car or motorcycle) over 50 miles to check all of them. I have summarized my results over this time-frame, although these numbers do not reflect the boxes I have given neighbors and who now keep their own records.

Year	# Clutches Fledged	# of Boxes
1999	7	13
2000	17	27
2001	21	30
2002	33	35
2003	51	47
2004	90	84
2005*	81	88

*(5 fledged 3 clutches, 21 fledged 2 clutches, 24 fledged 1 and 36 fledged 0)

It has taken up to a year or more for bluebirds in a new territory to find and utilize the boxes. Interestingly, some locations have peaked with fewer nests now than in the past, without significant changes in the habitat. In this part of East Texas with abundant forested lands (mixed pine and hardwood) I have had a real problem with flying squirrels, which has gotten worse with time. I have never removed a flying squirrel nest with the squirrel present in the box, but have done so if the nest is not occupied. This latter has proven to be a mistake, as they almost invariably return sooner or later. If a bluebird has taken up residence in the meantime, the bluebird nest is extremely likely to be destroyed. For this reason, I have come to believe it is a mistake to place another box in close proximity to one occupied by a flying squirrel, as one would do if the box is taken over by a native bird

other than a bluebird. My total number of boxes listed above includes boxes which are now the permanent residences of flying squirrels. I have never had a flying squirrel in a box on a metal pole, only on a telephone pole in fairly close proximity to woodlands or a large tree. I find now that the vast majority of predations of my bluebird nests are due to these animals. In 2005, nine of my 81 boxes are now permanent residences for flying squirrels, five of them new this year. Of the unsuccessful bluebird nests with at least eggs, two succumbed to fire ants (I have only seen fire ant predation in June or later), six were abandoned, six had eggs broken (mostly flying squirrel, probably raccoons as well), eight had eggs stolen with nests otherwise undisturbed (most likely snake), two had young stolen with nests otherwise undisturbed (one with snake scale). On two occasions in past years I have seen a rat snake in the box, perhaps because it may have been too fat to exit after the meal. One box this year contained dead young just over a week old.

Chickadees consistently appear to nest first in the season in some of my locations. This year saw the fledging of 7 chickadee families and 6 house wren families. This is why in some locations I have put up two boxes in close proximity, in case the chickadee gets a jump on the bluebirds. Fortunately, I have had no problems with house sparrows, as these don't live in the country, away from man providing a ready source of food. Interestingly, three of my boxes this year were occupied by black widow spiders complete with egg sacs after the season ended – I left these undisturbed.

I have decided to pursue blue-birding, even though by necessity I can only check the boxes over time intervals that are longer than optimal. This decreases the productivity of the boxes because there is a longer time interval to discover a calamity, after which the nest can be removed for another nesting attempt. Even abandoned nests with intact eggs will deter other bluebirds (not invariably, however), so with long intervals between visits it may take me over a month to determine that the nest has been abandoned. However, I do avoid the problem of seeing young abandoned and having to fret about their situation, which can be difficult emotionally for an avid blue birder.

I have already picked out spots for a few new boxes in the 2006 season. Some of these will replace boxes I have removed because of recurrent predation. I have come to enjoy both the bluebird season and the season in between (when I can get other things done in the country home). At some point, I feel destined to open the first chapter of BBA (bluebirders anonymous), if my urge to place more boxes doesn't come under some control!

Dr. Tom Wheeler, Membership # 00092, has contributed to Texas Bluebird Society with generous financial donations. Now, he contributed with this response to our always open invitation for articles for "Texas Blues." Please send your own "personal story" to editor@texasbluebirdsociety.org

TBS Annual Convention, October 29th 2006, Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne Afterglow

The day ended with a serendipitous moment ... at the close of the silent auction, Dick Park drew our attention to the sight on the patio floor. A Black-crested Titmouse explored several of the nestboxes stacked beneath our new color banner, "Free Nestbox with \$15.00 Membership." (Purchased with TBS membership dues, the banner travels to TBS events and TBS booths at festivals.)

We are grateful to Cibolo Nature Center for making their lovely new facility available to us.

And, we are particularly grateful to Jan Wrede who promoted our convention and took good care of us while we were there.

Bill Lindemann's presentation on the Texas Hill Country included an explanation of how the area was formed and beautiful slides.

Richard Heilbrun (Texas Parks & Wildlife, San Antonio) suggested that we landscape for insects in order to provide food for bluebirds and other insect-eating birds. An easy way to provide habitat for insects is with a brush pile. Place logs at the bottom to create empty spaces.

Richard has found large sheet metal cones effective in protecting nestboxes from snakes and other predators.

The always-popular silent auction raised over \$300 for bluebird conservation. Thanks to the high bidders (pictured) and to those who donated items or gift certificates:

BluebirdNut.com;
Sam's Guides Denise Townsend, Retail Sales Manager;
Jim Stevenson, Galveston Audubon Society;
Steve Garr;
Blaine Johnson, sparrowtrap.net;
Best 1 Hummingbird Feeders;
Rio Frio Lodging; LeAnn & Anthony Sharp;
Tapatio Springs Golf Resort;
Carol Schoch;
Toots & Lee Hutchins;
The Natures Way;
Alamo Café; and,
Outback Steakhouse.



President's Corner

Each TBS Board Member is a "True Blue Friend." Without their volunteer service, this organization would cease to exist. Please join me in expressing gratitude to those who serve.

Our annual meeting marked the time for "the changing of the guard", the changing of the Board of Directors who serve as the custodians of the organization ... those who work their tails off.

Those present gave a warm round of applause for the seven who completed a 2-year term of service: LeAnn Sharp; John Cys, Lee Hutchins, Dan Hanan, Lysle Mockler, Cheryl Anderson, and Charles Post.

TBS gifted each of the seven with a set of inscribed True Blue Friend plaques, one for a nestbox and a copy for display.

The members present elected three new directors: Jennifer Fleming (Orange); Philip Walker (Kyle); and, Norm Shoemaker (Woden); and, they elected Sharp, Hutchins and Hanan to a 2nd 2-year term; and, they elected Sandy Coggins to a 2-year term (a portion of this past year, Sandy served an appointed term).

Charles Post was appointed to fill the one-year remaining on Mary Leyendecker's term as a director.

Yours,
Pauline Tom, 512.268.5678
president@texasbluebirdsociety.org
Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

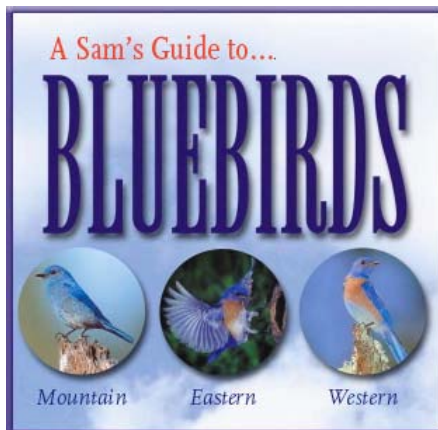
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Permit #444
Buda TX 78610

North American Bluebird Society Holiday Offer **"A Sam's Guide To Bluebirds" with \$30 Family Membership (no limit)**

With each \$30 Family Membership Gift and each \$30 Family Renewal, NABS will send (gift wrapped): "A Sam's Guide to Bluebirds", retail value \$24.95. This is a 2-disc set, DVD and CD-ROM that covers all three bluebird species.



For your gifts to others: Send to NABS the contact information for each recipient (name, address, phone, email). Also include your contact information. Include a \$30

check or money order for each gift. If you include a gift card for your recipient, we'll forward it on in their package.

To receive the gift from NABS for your renewal or membership: Send to NABS your name, NABS membership #, address, phone & email. Include a \$30 check or money order for your family renewal.

Mail to NABS' new address*:
The Bluebird Center
Attn: Holiday Offer
481 Athens Road
Royston GA 30662

Texas Bluebird Society, an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society, encourages dual memberships. NABS members receive a discount registration for the 2006 NABS Convention that is hosted by the Texas Bluebird Society. TBS members without NABS membership do not receive the NABS discount.

North American Bluebird Society recently moved its headquarters to an old farm house on a busy highway in NE Georgia, where bluebirds sing every day of the year.

ITEM DONATION FROM FRIEND OF NABS 2006

Each year the affiliate host of the annual North American Bluebird Society Convention depends upon generosity of fellow conservationists to supply donated items to help in underwriting the convention and raising funds for their bluebird conservation efforts. TBS will donate a portion of any profit from the convention to the North American Bluebird Society. NABS 2006 includes a live auction of 10 (or more)

high dollar items, two silent auctions, door prizes, prize drawings, and goodie bags. Among the items donated are bluebird- and nature-related collectibles, Texas memorabilia, antiques, handmade art, crafts, airline tickets, and use of vacation time-shares.

TBS is a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law

DONOR INFORMATION:

Company/Individual Name: _____
Please PRINT as you would like it to appear on any event materials or attach a business card

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Contact Person: _____ Title: _____

Web Site (URL): _____ E-mail: _____
for internal use only

ITEM INFORMATION:

Item: _____ Donor Stated Value: \$ _____

Item Description _____
Please be as detailed as possible. Attach additional sheet if necessary

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

Approximate Weight: _____ Approximate Dimensions: _____ Expiration Date: _____

PICK UP/SHIPPING INFORMATION:

Send to: NABS 2006 Auction, Etc.
c/o The BirdHouse, 1865 Boyd Road, Azle TX 76020

I PROMISE TO DELIVER THE GOODS/SERVICES DESCRIBED ABOVE

DONOR SIGNATURE: _____

To be listed, items must be received by April 1, 2006

CHECK ONE

Gift certificate or item enclosed Item will be mailed/shipped (date) _____

Item will be hand delivered (Phone The BirdHouse 817.444.8581 for hours of operation) by _____ (date)
by _____ (name)

Item will hand delivered during the convention (April 26 -28) by _____ (date)
by _____ (name) (Such hand-delivered items will not be listed)

Please pick up this item (This option is available in certain localities in Texas) Date available: _____

Pickup address & contact person: _____

We would be happy to display your business cards and/or brochures, if you would like to include them with your donation.

Questions? Phone Michelle Rider, (817) 237-3325 or auctions@NABS2006.com

FOR TBS VOLUNTEER:

Item received by _____ (name) on _____ (date)

NOTES: _____