



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

Volume 1 Issue 4

August September 2002

Welcome to the late summer issue of *Texas Blues*, the newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society. The first nesting season of our new organization is just about behind us as I write, and it is time to be reporting how your trails did this year. These records will help us track our success in "Bluebirds over Texas, one nest box at a time."

Speaking of trails and nestboxes, at least two of our members are involved in a very interesting study of nestbox heat and the impact on birds through Cornell labs. We hope to have a note about this study in an upcoming issue.

In this issue, we begin to look at winter bluebird preparations, what the nestbox monitor might expect to see on their trails over the winter months and what you can do to prepare your yard for winter bluebirds. We also introduce our first "to do" list helping you prepare for the off season. And, with our "Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s" coming up in San Marcos, the entire page 2 of this newsletter is devoted to all you need to know about this exciting upcoming event.

Mark Klym
Editor
[Mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us]

Please share this newsletter with your friends, family and other bird enthusiasts who may be interested in bluebirds. Let's help ensure *Bluebirds over Texas – one nestbox at a time.*



Did You Know:

That during the winter months bluebirds supplement their traditional insect diet with fruit?

You can encourage bluebirds in your yard during winter months by helping them with a secure food source. You can provide mealworms and/or fruit. On the following pages "Wintering Bluebirds in Texas" and "Preparing the Yard for Winter Birds" discuss important aspects of this important activity.

WINTERING BLUEBIRDS IN TEXAS

Bluebirds like to stay in Texas during the winter. It is common to see many of the bluebirds from your trail flocking together during the winter months. At times you may see 50 to 75 bluebirds winging across the sky in the vicinity of an established bluebird trail. At a minimum, the parents and all of the fledglings from a single nestbox will remain within close proximity to their summer home (12 to 17 birds). They are very playful during the winter time and can be seen chasing each other around your trail area or seen competing for the same insect.

Insects and other foods such as berries are plentiful here during winter. However, winter storms can greatly reduce Mother Nature's pantry stock. It is important for us stewards to attend our flocks by providing meal worms or other appropriate foods to help sustain them through the winter. Mealworms can be provided by a mealworm feeder which can be a simple open dish or a specially constructed feeder.

Bluebirds from the north (Yankees) will migrate down to Texas during the winter and join our southern birds. They will blend with the community until it is time to return home in early March to mid-April. It is quite difficult to tell the difference between northern bluebirds and southern bluebirds but northern birds are slightly larger since they need more body mass to survive the harsher early spring storms.

Bluebirds will often pile into your bird boxes during cold winter nights to get out of the cold. Don't forget to winterize your boxes as described on the Checklist on page 3.

I feel cooler already.

By R. David Shiels
[david@Caldwelleng.com]

President's Corner

Have you heard the exciting "blue news"? The first ever Texas Bluebird Society convention will be held in San Marcos on **October 11th (7 – 9 p.m.) and 12th (9 a.m.- 8:30 p.m. with breaks at lunch and before dinner)** We're calling it "**Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s**" (with the theme "...one nestbox at a time") to convey "fun and information for everyone interested in bluebirds!".

- **Join Us!** Together we will celebrate a successful year of bluebirds across Texas.
- **Spread the Word!** Below is a registration form which may be copied for you and your blues friends.
- **Help Us!** We need items for prizes and a silent auction. Be recognized as a special **FIRST** blues contributor.

The celebration is being held at the Quality Inn, San Marcos. Seminars and presentations are planned for Friday evening and all day Saturday. We are honored to have Steve Garr, President of Tennessee Bluebird Trails and NABS Board Member as our keynote speaker on Saturday night. Hear Steve's amazing "Bluebirds...Not Just for the Country", the story of his successful efforts to bring rural bluebirds into downtown Nashville.

Send in the registration form at the bottom of this page today. Lodging reservations should be made directly through the San Marcos Quality Inn (512 353-7770) **before October 1st** to receive the special convention room rate of \$59.95.

Do you have that special something to donate as a prize or silent auction item? contact Doug Rohde, 972 317-5500 or [d.rohde@attbi.com].
by *Pauline Tom*, [tbs@austin.rr.com], 512.268.5678

Question: What will I experience at "Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s" ? (Registration form below)

Answer: Here's the basic line-up for the event:

Friday evening, 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. (Oct 11th)

- Slide show by Keith Kridler, author of "Bluebird Monitor's Guide" with Q&A

Saturday morning, 9 a.m. – Noon (Oct 12th)

- "Heat Shiel" Report by David Shiels, TBS Board Member with discussion on ways to reduce deaths due to hot weather
- "Bluebirds Year-Round" by Steve Garr, President of Tennessee Bluebird Trails with Q&A
- "Backyard Photography" by Brian & Shirley Loflin, nature photographers

Saturday afternoon, 1:00 – 5:30 (Oct 12th)

- "Bats" by Meg Goodman, Texas Parks & Wildlife
- "Lake Arrowhead State Park Bluebird Project" by John Cys
- "Effective Presentations"
- "Speaking with Media"
- "Landscaping for Wildlife" by Mark Klym

Saturday evening, 6:30 – 8:30 (Oct 12th)

- Keynote Speaker & Dinner**, "Bluebirds – Not Just for the Country" by Steve Garr who has bluebirds nesting in downtown Nashville

***Silent Auction and House Sparrow Help Desk
will be open during breaks***

TBS Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s Quality Inn San Marcos

October 11th – 12th, 2002 (Friday evening 7 – 9 p.m. & Saturday 9 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.)

for **information** about Celebration contact Pauline Tom, [tbs@austin.rr.com] or 512 268-5678
to **donate an item** for prize/silent auction, contact Doug Rohde, [d.rohde@attbi.com] or 972 317-5500
to **reserve lodging at special rate**, contact Quality Inn, 512 353-7770 before October 1st

Registration Form

Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s, Quality Inn San Marcos

Must be received by **September 1st** for entry into Early Registration Prize Drawing

Name(s): _____
Address: _____

Phone: _____
Email: _____

Fee, including dinner:
\$20 Member
\$30 Non-member
(includes membership)

Late Registrations (after September 1st) –
add \$5.00

Mail check or money order to:
Texas Bluebird Society
P O Box 40868, Austin TX 78704

July / August Checklist

- ✓ Do not leave buckets or tubs of water or oil uncovered. Entire families of bluebirds may drown in these. And, open water is breeding ground for mosquitoes; mosquitoes carry diseases to birds as well as to humans.
- ✓ When nesting season is over, complete "Texas Bluebird Society Member's 2002 Nest Summary". The form is available with May / June 2002 newsletter on our website (www.texasbluebirdsociety.org) or by mailing a self-addressed stamped envelope. (If your season ended in early summer, consider adding more ventilation and a larger second roof with one-half inch air space to your nestboxes to extend the nesting season.)
- ✓ Clean any old nests from nestboxes using inverted plastic bag and dispose away from nesting area. Sweep and scrape nestbox interior with putty spatula..
- ✓ If it has been more than a month since you checked nestbox, be more cautious than usual when opening. Possible inhabitants include mice, flying squirrels, snakes and paper wasps. A small wasp nest can be knocked down with putty spatula. A large nest can be removed at dark in early winter when wasps are sluggish. (Don't use a flashlight; wasps will be drawn to the light!) Err on the side of safety for the birds rather than using insecticides in the nestbox.
- ✓ If you live near a city where European Starlings strip berries from trees during winter, gather winter food for bluebirds. Locate dogwood trees that have large numbers of green berries. As soon as they turn red they are ripe and should be gathered. Pokeweed and sumac have berries that are in clusters. When ripe you can clip the entire cluster and store them in the refrigerator in a plastic bag. Ripe berries outside city (in areas where they're not likely to be stripped by starlings) should be left for birds. Also, many Floribunda Roses (*R. multiflora*) can provide clusters of rose hips after blooming.
- ✓ Consider winterizing some of your nestboxes. Face the boxes away from prevailing winter winds. Cut a piece of cardboard to fit the bottom of the nestbox. It should be snug enough to block the drafts of the bottom drainage holes. Add weather stripping in the top vents. When bluebirds roost they leave droppings on the floor of the box. Do your bluebirds prefer sealed boxes or unaltered boxes to roost? Try both and let us know preference of bluebirds in your area later in the winter.

Preparing the Yard for Winter Birds

For many people in the United States it is hard to think of late summer and early fall as a time for planting, yet for us here in Texas, this can be one of the best times to prepare our yard for birds. The unusual summer we are experiencing in central Texas may make this a little difficult for this year, but we can certainly make some changes that will benefit the birds.

A look around the garden at this time of year generally shows some drying seed heads, fruit beginning to fill out and ripen and birds beginning to scurry about the yard, spending more time near feeders. These are all signs of the approaching winter months, and reminders that we need to get our yards ready!

Now is a good time to put in a plant that will produce fruit in late winter or early spring, about the time that our yaupon berries are used up and the birds are looking for another supplement. It is also a great time to add some new wind breaking plants so that they have the winter to grow before the summer sets in. Next winter, these will be a nice screen in your yard and a great spot to watch for birds getting out of the wind!

And while we're talking about shelter, clean out the old nests and winterize your nestboxes. (See July/August Checklist.)

Do your birds have enough water? I know in central Texas right now this is not an issue, but what about early in the autumn after a dry summer? Can they find a good source of clean water on your trail? You might help out. Even a small birdbath will provide some comfort for these birds, but if you can get the water moving it will be even more attractive. A sprinkler, a drip hose, a fountain or even a milk jug with a hole in it will serve as a great source of moving fresh water for your birds. And moving water that is kept fresh is not attractive to mosquitos.

These few simple tips will help make your yard more attractive to birds over the winter months.

Mark Klym
[Mark.klym@tpwd.state.tx.us]

NABS Convention 2002 Report

Eight TBS members attended the NABS Convention in Penticton, British Columbia in June! Keith Kridler reported:

What a GREAT time was had by ALL. 300+ people from 27 states and 6 Canadian Provinces showed up to exchange information and attend the final banquet! 200+ people went on bus tours on Friday to various destinations around Penticton. I ran into one fellow that drove 10 hours from Washington State that was not even into bluebirds that came to be with "others who love birds". He was SOOOO excited just to be riding around with those talking about birds, those actively involved with saving birds, those who were trying to save habitat and those involved with saving the various other living and wonderful creations that surround each of us! This meeting EXUDED excitement and spread the "Bluebird Fever" to those only mildly interested. ... THIS is what NABS meetings are about! Just standing next to some of these people you will absorb some of the excitement and "warmth" from them just like basking in sunshine! ...

Try to make plans to join one of the next two NABS meetings as there is NO WAY to put into words this type of experience! We (the birds and NABS) desperately need the support of each and every one of you right now joining with 3,500+ active members of NABS so that we can continue to make a profound difference, for the birds and for those people we meet who are "borderline" bluebirders KK

Consider attending the North American Bluebird Society Convention (and see Sandhill Crane migration!) in Kearney, Nebraska, March 20 - 23. Reserve a room while they are available! Get details on [www.nabluebirdsociety.org] or mail request to address below..

Texas Bluebird Society members that work with or are members of the North American Bluebird Society might want to take note that NABS has a new address and a new executive director:

[The North American Bluebird Society](#)
[The Wilderness Center](#)
[Lisa Bulick, Executive Director](#)
[P.O. Box 244](#)
[Wilmot OH 44689](#)
[Phone \(888\) 235 1331](#)

Bewick Wren's Nest and Eggs
Lake Arrowhead State Park
Clay Co., Texas
May 18, 2002
Nest Box B9



*Note the temperature monitor in this nestbox!
Part of a Cornell study on nestbox heat.
Details next issue. Photo courtesy of John Cys*

*Cys will speak about his trail on October 12th at
Celebration of Texas Blue(bird)s, San Marcos Quality
Inn. (see page 2)*

Help Wanted
WEBMASTER
Immediate Opening
contact tbs@austin.rr.com

Do you know of volunteer with skills and interest to make updates to Texas Bluebird Society's website [www.texasbluebirdsociety.org]?

Laura Craig who has served in this capacity since inception of Texas Bluebird Society is resigning to devote her time and energy to her growing family. *Thank you, Laura, for your contribution to this organization and congratulations on the birth of your second son, Michael Casey Craig.*

Texas Bluebird Society

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website www.texasbluebirdsociety.org

annual memberships are \$10.00/individual or \$15 / household