



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

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October / November 2003

IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

Mention of the upcoming 2nd Annual Convention on Saturday, November 15th at the LCRA Riverside Center in Bastrop is woven throughout this newsletter. See if you can find seven references made to the event.

Four stories by a new member who volunteered to write, Mary Leyendecker, add a new dimension to "Texas Blues". Starting with reports and correspondence from Texas Bluebird Society members, Mary wrote full-length articles that you will enjoy..

Mary Leach Leyendecker, edits the weekly newsletter for Corpus Christi ISD, is a native Texan whose relatives are birders, quail, dove and duck hunters with a deep appreciation for wildlife habitat management.

We will look forward to more contributions from Mary!

Pauline Tom, President

Keith Kridler receives CORNERSTONE award



Much to the surprise of Keith Kridler, his "introduction" as the speaker for the day at the Gulf Coast Bluebird Symposium in Beaumont on August 9th was actually the presentation of the "Cornerstone Award", an award specially created to honor Keith.

In a PowerPoint slide presentation, Pauline Tom showed how Keith Kridler is, indeed, a "cornerstone" of Texas Bluebirding and of the Texas Bluebird Society.

Keith was co-founder of Texas Bluebird Society and the first Vice-President. The birth of Texas Bluebird Society coincided with the release of the book he co-authored, "The Bluebird Monitor's Guide". The respect people have for Keith as the most renowned Texas bluebirder transferred over to respect for the fledgling organization.

A "primer" he wrote that is now known as "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Bluebirds but didn't know to ask" got TBS started as it was mailed to all North American Bluebird Society members in Texas along with a membership form. It brought in dozens of memberships.

As a pioneer in Texas Bluebird Society, Keith forged the way as a mentor by building and providing hundreds of nestboxes (made from scrap pine logs) each year, speaking to dozens of groups in the first two years of TBS, and helping others start bluebird trails.. This is the same work he had done on his own for years.

The large, heavy carved stone "Cornerstone Award" with gold lettering was symbolic of the critical role Keith Kridler provided in the start-up of Texas Bluebird Society as the organization started on the mission "Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time."

Cornerstone Award



Keith Kridler
a
CORNERSTONE
of
Texas Bluebirding
and of the
Texas Bluebird Society

**Awarded with admiration,
August 9, 2003**

NEEDED: Items for the Silent Auction at the Annual Convention. This is our major fundraiser.

To **donate an item**, please contact Jennifer Fleming, [jffleming@pnx.com] or 409 886-3975

Test Your **BLUE IQ**

- After fledging, bluebirds may return to the nest to rest, be fed The Eastern Bluebird is the state bird of New York.
 - True
 - False
- Fellow cavity nester the Carolina Chickadee typically have as many as ____ successful nestings in a year.
 - Only 1
 - Two
 - Three
 - Four
- Eastern, Western and Mountain Bluebirds nest in Texas.
 - True
 - False
- A House Sparrow is a fierce fighter inside the nestbox due to:
 - Superior speed
 - Superior strength
 - Short, strong legs
 - Beak design
- Albino Bluebirds hatch from white eggs.
 - True
 - False
- From tip of beak to tip of tail the Eastern Bluebird measures:
 - 5-1/2 to 6-1/2 inches
 - 6-1/2 to 7-1/2 inches
 - 7-1/2 to 8-1/2 inches
 - 9-1/2 to 10-1/2 inches
- The female Bluebird does all of the incubation because:
 - The male hunts for food
 - The male is too heavy
 - The female has a “brood patch”
 - The male is stronger and better protects the nest
- Which of the following is NOT an attribute of a “good nestbox”?
 - An oversized hole to prevent easy access / escape
 - A light colored wood or painted with a light color.
 - Seams on top sealed to help keep the nest dry.
 - A closure mechanism that protects against accidental opening
- The Bluebird will reuse a nest how many times?
 - 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3 or more
- How long do Bluebirds sleep each night?
 - 8 hours
 - 4 hours
 - 80 minutes
 - 8 minutes

Answers are on the back page

Resilience of bluebird embryos astonishes researcher

Is science underestimating maternal love?

When a DFW-area clutch hatched after consecutive days in excess of 109F degrees, folks in the field asked, “Hey, how’d they do that?”

Dr. Caren Cooper of Cornell University, who had interpreted for *BirdScope* readers that nationwide research indicates damage to eggs begins at 105 degrees, believes that *bluebird* embryos can survive over 105F.

“The numbers regarding embryo development mostly come from studies of poultry. Very little is known about critical temperatures for the development of passerine embryos. Most assume that 105 is a maximum critical temperature for all species because cell physiology is usually similar. The best summary of this literature is Webb 1987 in a paper called ‘Thermal tolerance of avian embryos: a review’ in *The Condor*, volume 89, pages 874-898. The Cooper (no relation!) Ornithological Society publishes *The Condor*. There have been lots of related studies since that have relied on these numbers and none has found contradictions.”

Dr. Cooper is interested in seeing anecdotal evidence related to an idea she’s forming that the bluebird mom may be cooling the eggs.

“Shorebirds and desert birds are known to ‘reduce’ the temperature of their eggs. Some birds actually carry water in their feathers and get the eggs wet to cool them by evaporation. Research also suggests that birds will cool themselves by panting and, when cooler than the eggs, will receive heat in a transfer process from the eggs. Thus, they transfer the heat load from the eggs and dissipate it through panting, and so protect the embryo from overheating,” says Dr. Cooper.

The scientist admits she’s intrigued. Panting takes lots of energy and would require a nestbound mom to slip away for frequent drinks of water. “I would really like to know how those eggs survived. If it happens again next year, we may be able to know if we get a data logger in that nest cup. There is still a lot to learn about these birds!”

In a conversation with board member Cheryl Anderson, owner of The BirdHouse store in Azle and proud nestbox landlord, she mentioned that there is water close by, so Dr. Cooper’s idea is plausible. The water near the nestbox is a stock tank and it’s about 50 yards down the hill.

As more and more nestboxes get nestcams, we’ll discover more and more about what goes on inside the box. Would the bluebird dad keep the eggs covered while mom’s away? Could he carry a sip of water in his beak? Dad doesn’t have a brood patch, so he can’t “incubate” ... He could come in wet from a bath or bring water. We can only imagine.

But *you* might have proof from an actual observation. Please feel free to send it in and/or present your findings at our Convention in Bastrop on November 15th!

Life is tweet to bluebirders and their taxes are lower, too!

Wildlife managers near Giddings find bluebirds “everywhere” while enjoying tax benefits of nestboxes

Bluebirds hatched in late August from a martin house, said Ann Thames of Carmine.

“I can hear them when the parents land on the perch. I also saw a youngster at my seed feeder ... had a spotted breast and was definitely a bluebird. And when I walk the property every day, I see adults on the fence lines and rummaging in the grass!”

Although there are many martin houses across Texas, it is unusual to have bluebirds nesting in them, making the Thames’ observation both significant and encouraging. In areas with an established bluebird population, bluebirds will occasionally use an alternate site. For instance, the previous issue of “Texas Blues” showed Cliff Shackelford’s photo of a bluebird nest in a light fixture. He’s planning to get a genuine bluebird nestbox up in that relative’s yard near Houston.

And in Mount Pleasant, where there is an extremely high population of bluebirds (due to thousands of bluebird nestboxes that Keith Kridler and others have installed in the county over the past 20 years), bluebirds frequently nest in rural mailbox newspaper “cavities” and even have nested in cavities under the bleachers in the high school football stadium.

Placing a nestbox built to bluebird nestbox standards (such as the BN-series of nestboxes found on the Texas Bluebird Society website, www.TexasBluebirdSociety.org) in an appropriate spot is the most effective way we’ve all found to attract bluebirds

Anytime is a good time to install a nestbox. By installing them now, birds may spot them as potential nesting sites as they fly over during the winter; and several might huddle in a nestbox for warmth on a cold winter night.

Bluebirds start nestbox site selection in January in Texas and there are some bluebirds still nesting in August.

Many people have “birdhouses” in their yards for many years with no bluebirds, and they have bluebirds nest (sometimes within hours, sometimes within years) when they add a bluebird nestbox.

Bluebirds will use a hole larger than 1.5” but it makes them more susceptible to predators such as owls; and, with a hole larger than 1 9/16”, European Starlings can evict the bluebirds. Martins actually have 2” holes. The bluebirds in Carmine used the cavity.

“At the time the bluebirds nested in the martin house, Ann had genuine bluebird nestboxes on hand that were ready to be installed,” says Pauline Tom. In some areas, (but nowhere near Giddings) there are “TBS Bluebird Ambassadors” who will provide counsel. PTom was glad to reroute a trip towards Houston to kick some dirt with Ann and advise on sites offering the best potential.

The Thames property supports a Wildlife Management Plan which reciprocates landowners in some parts of Texas with a low tax rate. Eligible landowners participating in the plan may order bluebird nestboxes in bulk from the Texas Bluebird Society for \$15/each. They must be ordered in advance and picked up in Central Texas. The Ambassadors and tax benefit programs will be described in an upcoming edition but why delay? Contact Pauline for immediate details at tbs@austin.rr.com.

How many eggs in the bird? How many birds in the egg?

Resident landowners in Piney Woods provide environment to increase state’s number of bluebirds

Dr. Tom Wheeler of Bellaire reports he had 43 boxes up at the beginning of the 2003 season and 45 by the end. “This does not include five boxes that I donated to neighbors like Wendell Davis there in Tyler County (probably eight nests fledged). Fifty-one of my nests fledged young, but I don’t have an exact count because I could only monitor on average about every other week. I lost no young to fire ants this year, which had claimed at least one nest in each of the last three years. I had one mother killed on her nest, probably by a house sparrow, with wounds to the head only. I had several successful early chickadee nests and four of my boxes harbored flying squirrels at one time or another. I found a big (rat?) snake in an empty box, so I got the snake out and took the box down.” Dr. Wheeler has placed many of his boxes on telephone poles, a reliable approach to avoid predators.

In honor of his outstanding effort to help save bluebirds, Tom will be receiving special recognition at the annual convention. on Saturday, November 15th in Bastrop. Texas Bluebird Society will pay tribute to those people in our organization who have either built a bluebird trail of more than 25 nestboxes or have conducted significant work with the “One Nestbox” pilot project.

from the “Board Member Application” of

LeAnn Sharp, nominee, Board Member election on November 15th

Enjoys and has experience in talking to groups and setting up booths (she has done both for TBS); comes up with creative ideas that other people carry out (NatureQuest, now a 5-day festival attracting hundreds, is her brainchild); business owner for 25 years. She says, “In five year Texas Bluebird Society should be a household word across Texas” with nestboxes spread across the state; and, she’ll work towards having every TBS member involved in the organization in some way.

2nd Annual Convention

Saturday, November 15th, 9 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

LCRA Riverside Conference Center

near Bastrop's Fisherman Park

Pre-Registration, before November 10th, \$15 (*non-members*, \$20)

At-the-Door Registration, \$20 (*non-members* \$25)

Registration Fee includes Famous Billy's BBQ at 5:30

Reservations may be made online at texasbluebirdsociety.org

Lodging is available at the Holiday Inn Express, 512 321-1900
"Texas Bluebird Society" rate of \$69 - \$75 through November 1st

Featured speaker, Doug LeVasseur
Immediate Past-President of the North American Bluebird Society

Texas Bluebird Society

P.O. Box 40868

Austin TX 78704

FIRST CLASS MAIL

*Bluebirds Across Texas ...
one nestbox at a time*

TO:

How did you do on "Test Your **BLUE IQ**"?

Answers:

- | | | |
|------|-------|-----------------------------|
| 1. B | 6. B | Scoring: |
| 2. D | 7. C | 0 - 3 Laid a blue egg |
| 3. A | 8. A | 4 - 6 A hatchling |
| 4. B | 9. A | 7 - 9 A beautiful fledgling |
| 5. B | 10. D | 10 SOAR BLUE, SOAR! |

Love lasts with bluebirds

Check out the Aug. 2003 issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine for an article about the newfound happiness at Bluebird Hill.

For thirty golden years along the Frio, a thriving trail engaged the guests and family circles of Bluebird Hill Bed & Breakfast. Children's giggles and couples' relaxed laughter were woven into the seasons' careful reports of eggs and fledglings from six nest boxes. But when illness over the winter of 2000 claimed their brave patriarch all too close to Valentine's Day, it just broke everyone's heart. Nature did what it could to soothe the sting. Eventually, says LeAnn Sharp, "I decided that my husband, son and I needed to take over the responsibility of the BB trail, and try to get Mom interested in the Bluebirds again. We became involved with the TX BB Society so we could learn what we needed to know about taking care of the trails." Amid the jolly camaraderie of 2002 Convention, life found a way. "I won/bought three nest boxes in the Silent Auction. I bought one more from the sales table, and Bain & Anthony each won one as a door prize.

So that gave us a big start with six, plus the one I made," said LeAnn. The lodge has reopened its doors for business and Mom is back to rattling pots and pans in her tidy, sun-filled kitchen. Relatives homecoming for Thanksgiving and Christmas were eager to help install the new boxes but had to miss the best part of spring. "We had 68 eggs total and I estimate about 60 fledglings," said LeAnn. "This summer, the box outside Mom's yard fence was crowded with bluebirds. They would sit on the backs of the rocking chairs, and look at themselves in the window pane." Mom's smiling to think of the happy days ahead -- she knows what Santa's bringing for her loved ones -- and we're smiling, too. Our long-awaited 2003 Convention is Saturday, Nov. 15, in Bastrop. "See you there!"

Permission is granted for this publication to be reprinted and distributed along with TBS Membership Form.

Texas Bluebird Society

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Annual memberships are \$10.00 OR \$15 for an entire household