



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

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August / September 2003

IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

You'll be educated and entertained as one bluebirder after another shares their experiences ...as we work together for "Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time".

Three have shared photos ... from the usual (that never grow old) to the very unusual. And one TBS Board Member shares his "bluebirding pedigree" and vision for TBS.

The feature story by a golf course superintendent reminds us of how we're sharing beauty with our world when we bring bluebirds to our community by simply placing nestboxes. This makes a difference in the lives of people around us.

Our two major events of 2003 are publicized on the back page. The Symposium in Beaumont and the Annual Convention in Bastrop will be opportunities to learn from others and to share with others.

And finally, enjoy the first "Blues IQ" quiz to test your knowledge of bluebird factual information – some little known facts at that.

If you discover a factual error in a TBS newsletter or any publication of Texas Bluebird Society (or in a talk by a member of our Speaker's Bureau), please let us know. It is our desire to be a conduit for exchange of factual information on bluebirds and bluebirding between Texans. In doing so we will become recognized as the authority on bluebirds in Texas and be a valued resource to birding and other naturalist organizations.



Remember your first blue eggs?

"We are new to the Bluebird watchers group. Read your Texas Blues Newsletter and it asked for pictures. Please find attached a picture of our first egg batch..."

Bill and Lois Robinette



What a Slot Box!

Clifford Shackelford photographed this bluebird "nestbox" in Montgomery County. "The nest is in a carport light fixture that is missing a bolt so it is sagging a bit. The relatives have NOT been using that light since the nest has been active -- they don't want to cook the eggs or disturb a sleeping and brooding adult at night."

Please hold on to your trail results

Soon (within months) we will have a computer program that will allow 2003 Season Summaries to be entered on-line.

The data we collect will be almost identical to the data collected for the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail by the North American Bluebird Society (NABS).

Our data will be shared with NABS. One entry on the TBS system will transfer your data to TBS and to NABS. (If you want your individual trail to appear on NABS' website, it will be necessary to enter the data on both sites.)

Test Your **BLUE IQ**

1. After fledging, bluebirds may return to the nest to rest, be fed and escape from predators.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. In Texas, Eastern Bluebirds may have as many as _____ nestings.
 - a. Only 1
 - b. Two
 - c. Three
 - d. Four
3. The bluebird is a member of the Thrush family.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. The average life expectancy of the Eastern Bluebird is
 - a. One year
 - b. Two years
 - c. Three years
 - d. Four or more years
5. White bluebird eggs are laid by an albino female.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. At what maximum temperature are eggs still viable?
 - a. 100 F
 - b. 102 F
 - c. 104 F
 - d. 106 F
7. Incubation can only occur when the female is sitting on the nest.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. Which of the following is NOT an attribute of a "good nestbox"?
 - a. The roof has overhang on front
 - b. The wood has been properly treated inside and out to prevent decay.
 - c. Drainage slots are provided on the bottom.
 - d. Mounted on pipe or conduit
9. Eastern Bluebirds normally fledge in
 - a. 10 - 13 days
 - b. 13 - 16 days
 - c. 16 - 20 days
 - d. 20 - 24 days
10. How fast do bluebirds fly?
 - a. 5 - 10 mph
 - b. 10 - 15 mph
 - c. 15 - 20 mph
 - d. 20 - 25 mph

answers are on the back page

Compiled by Doug Rohde, doug@texasbluebirdsociety.org



Teresa Williams of Mountain City reported this Brown-headed Cowbird egg in a Black-crested Titmouse nest. It's unusual for cowbirds lay eggs in "bluebird" nestboxes because the one and one-half inch hole is difficult for them to enter.

TBS Opportunities for Service

- **Newsletter Editor**
- **Laptop Computer(s) for presenting PowerPoint shows**
- **"TBS Bluebird Ambassadors"**

You CAN make a difference by active participation!

Contact information is on the back page

President's Corner

"What a wonderful thing to do for our community" was the reaction from a friend when I told her the story of working to bring a population of bluebirds to Mountain City. I thought I was doing it for the birds and for the joy and satisfaction I receive. But, she was right. Bluebirding is also similar to planting wildflowers ... a nestbox is planted that later brings wondrous beauty that multiplies and enhances the world in which we live.

And the joy spreads between people, too. The story on the next page shows how Mike Scarbrough's desire to bring more bluebirds to Keller (to the golf course where he recognized appropriate habitat) made a genuine difference in the life of the golf course superintendent.

And now, Steven Best has shared the hope of bluebirds with golf course superintendents across the country. WOW! As a member of TBS, you're a part of this story.

Peace, Joy & HOPE!!!

PTom president@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Find Home at Sky Creek Ranch

by Stephen Best, Golf Course Superintendent

In November 2001, Texas Bluebird Society placed a bluebird trail at Sky Creek Ranch Golf Course in Keller. This article was written for a golf course superintendents' publication

I would like to share a success story with you about the Eastern Bluebird at Sky Creek Ranch. Mike Scarbrough, who moved to the Hidden Lakes Subdivision three years ago, tried a Bluebird nestbox (house) in his backyard and within a year had fledged four Eastern Bluebirds. Being a member of the Texas Bluebird Society, Mike wanted to expand on this success. Because Mike's house bordered the golf course he thought this would be a great place to add some nestboxes. I first met Mike in the fall of 2001 when he approached us about putting some nestboxes out on the course. **At first, I can say I was not the biggest bird fan and knew very little about what to do or even what to look for, but over the course of the last year I have totally changed my way of thinking about birds and especially the Eastern Bluebird.** Before I talk about the success of these nestboxes at Sky Creek Ranch I would like to give you a little history about these birds and why they are so special.

In the 1930's Bluebirds were a very common bird in the state of Texas. They were a symbol of happiness and quite the little singers. Over time many factors started to affect the population of the birds. Introduction of the House Sparrow and the European Starling in the mid to late 1800's, along with environmental changes, did not allow these less aggressive birds to continue with the success they once had. By the 1950's there was a serious decline in Bluebird populations in Texas and all over the United States. By the 1970's experts say that ninety percent of the Eastern Bluebirds had disappeared, and other species were in serious decline as well.

Bluebird enthusiasts organized to share with others the plight of the Bluebird and how the Bluebird might be saved by putting out man-made cavities – nestboxes. The Bluebird must have a cavity in order to nest. The nestboxes simulate the cavities excavated by woodpeckers. Because most Bluebirds would normally nest in an old woodpecker site, it brought about the idea of a nesting box. Most of these nestboxes are easy to build. The key is to only use a nestbox with an entrance hole no bigger than one and a half inches in diameter. This will keep out most undesirable species and allow others like the Bluebird, Tufted Titmouse, and Carolina Chickadee, along with many more, to enjoy making a home in this nestbox. However, the inch and a half hole will not keep out the House Sparrow. This aggressive, non-native competitor will take out eggs, nestlings, and kill adult Bluebirds. When a nestbox is overtaken by a House Sparrow it is best to clean out the nestbox and start over. Weekly monitoring will help in keeping this predator out.

With the formation of groups like the Texas Bluebird Society we can now relax and start listening again to the sweet songs of the Bluebird. There are success stories all over Texas and the United States. This is what I will share with you today.

Under the leadership of Mike's mentor, Keith Kridler, we started out with twenty-one nestboxes placed in various locations on the course in the fall of 2001. Finding the right location was sometimes challenging to say the least. At Sky Creek we had to learn the hard way at first. In March of last year we had a six inch rain which ended up washing away a couple of the nestboxes. Well, we have learned now to keep them out of the flood zone and have found some really unique areas where we have had great success. Mike and his neighbor Joseph Ovalle monitored these nestboxes every Saturday morning at 7 a.m. from January of 2002 to August of 2002. Here are some of the results that we had in our first year.

Eastern Bluebird	98 fledged
Tufted Titmouse	10 fledged
Carolina Chickadee	6 fledged

As you can see from this chart we had great success in the first year. During the fall of 2002 Mike came to me to ask if Sky Creek Ranch would be interested in upgrading our houses to a longer lasting material that would also not get so hot during the summer months. So this year we have twenty-one new Bluebird houses, built by Alan Jackson of Keller, scattered throughout the course. These new nestboxes come with five star accommodations compared to the others. So far this year's nesting has been just as impressive as last year's, and I am looking forward to seeing their results in the next couple of months. **I have been amazed at what Mike, Joseph, and the Texas Bluebird Society have added to Sky Creek Ranch. I really enjoy my morning ride around the golf course a lot more now that these birds are around. It is a sight for sore eyes, especially in the middle of the summer when we all have a lot of pressure on us to keep the courses in tip top shape.** We continue to receive nice compliments from golfers about how beautiful these birds are. I have learned a lot over the past two years and am looking forward to continuing to learn more about these unique birds in the future. I challenge all of you fellow Superintendents to get more involved in these types of projects. For me it was not only exciting to see results, but also something that added a lot of beautiful new birds to our property.

For more information about Bluebirds in Texas, visit www.texasbluebirdsociety.org.

Saturday, August 9
Gulf Coast Bluebird Symposium
a joint venture with Golden Triangle Audubon Society
Keith Kridler, featured speaker
Beaumont's Tyrell Park Garden Center
9:00 – 5:00

Registration at the door \$7.00

This is our first annual regional event. All bluebirders are invited to attend. The material presented is of general interest, not specific to the Gulf Coast.

TBS Annual Convention

Saturday, November 15th

**LCRA Riverside Conference Center
near Bastrop's Fisherman Park**

Keynote Speaker, Doug LeVasseur
Immediate Past President of the
North American Bluebird Society

Reserve accommodations now!
(On a UT football weekend rooms go fast)

For lodging at the Holiday Inn Express,
phone 512 321-1900.

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

Getting to Know the TBS Board Members who serve you

from the "Board Member Application" of

W. Lamont Brown, recently appointed as Vice-President of Texas Bluebird Society

- Am gaining Eastern Bluebird experience (2 years' experience; 9 nestboxes)
- Have used strategic planning/thinking in corporate environment
- Administrative minded
- Embrace high Tech/Internet initiatives as the wave of the future
- 20 years experience in Senior Marketing in For Profit Business
- 18 years CEO of domestic Non-Profit organization (Christian business and humanitarian) and CEO of foreign corporation
- *"TBS can/should be among the National leaders of Bluebird Societies in repopulation of bluebirds; Because of our diverse terrain, by developing initiatives that work in various areas we can become a microcosm (model) for other U.S. Regions. Grassroots is a key. Ambassador program is a great start. ... My goal is to participate."*

To obtain a "Board Member Application" form, email
"info@texasbluebirdsociety.org"

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

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Vice-President, Lamont Brown 940-891-4400 (work)

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