



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

Volume 3, Issue 1

February / March 2004

IN THIS NEWSLETTER...

Just in time for the nesting season, the insert in this issue is the revised "Weekly Field Worksheet". By keeping records on this form, you will have the data to complete a "Season Summary Form" at the end of the season. Please keep records and share them with us.

Do keep records of nestings; but, don't keep "souvenirs" – not even if you're using nests and eggs for educational purposes. Find out why in the article by Cliff Shackelford.

On each page of this newsletter, find out why we're soliciting help from volunteers and seeking donations.

If you read carefully, you'll find some unique bluebirding tips on each page of this newsletter, even within reports and requests.

In our next issue: Read about our new "True Blue Friend" program and learn more about monitoring and record keeping.



To Tree or Not to Tree?

Q. What's the correct distance from a tree for a bluebird nestbox?

- A. Whatever works best for you is best. Try various distances. At our 2003 convention, some reported that when they put their nestbox under the canopy of a tree or near a tree in order to provide protection from the sun, other species claimed the nestbox.

Many members, including Kate Arnold of Paris, place their nestboxes under the canopy of a large tree to provide protection from the sun and consistently attract bluebirds. Kate adds, "I have had successful nestings, and no snake problems."

It is accurate to state that a nestbox should not be mounted on a tree in Texas. If bluebirds happen to nest, the eggs and nestlings would be an easy "box lunch" for a predator such as a squirrel, raccoon or snake.

HELP WANTED NOW & LATER

NABS Convention

5th Weekend in April of 2006

"Somewhere in Texas!"

Plans are in the start-up stage for the 2006 North American Bluebird Society "NABS" Convention which will be hosted by the Texas Bluebird Society. Hundreds, coast to coast, are expected to attend. Volunteers will be needed with experience in greetings, logistics, registration, workshop facilitation, and other skills related to large-group events. The e-mail identity 2006help@texasbluebirdsociety.org has been set up for those who are willing to help.

Please consider how you might assist TBS in hosting in this massive undertaking.

Corporate Sponsorships

- Coordinator to develop a plan for Corporate Sponsorships
- Committee Members to assist with the Sponsorship plan and make contacts with potential corporate sponsors
- Individuals and companies who are willing to make a contribution for the Convention start-up costs
- Individuals and companies who are willing to be contacted regarding a sponsorship

TBS Booth at NABS 2004 Convention in Ithaca, New York, July 8-10

Art works for fundraisers – can you help?

Potential Speakers

- Do you know a fabulous birder, naturalist, photographer, nestbox builder, motivator, etc. willing to speak (free) at the Convention and/or lead a workshop?
- Do you have a paper or presentation for consideration?

What service or skill do you have that might be offered

- Meeting or event planner
- Commercial license
- Can compile spreadsheet with volunteers' data
- Printing services
- Other _____
- Other _____

Again, the email address for your response is

2006help@texasbluebirdsociety.org

NEST, EGG & FEATHER COLLECTIONS: not for hobbyists

by Clifford Shackelford

It's illegal to collect eggs and nests, and don't go picking up body parts, either.

The ratio is about 1 game warden per 42,000 Texans, and while it is probably very rare to be caught and convicted for having native bird feathers, people need to be aware of a little-known federal and state wildlife law.

All native birds are protected, and this includes any "parts" of birds like feathers. Pet or caged birds and game birds (with hunting seasons) are exempt, of course.

Yes, folks can have a turkey flight feather or a mallard curly-que" in their baseball cap. But watch out for those Barred Owl or bluebird feathers!

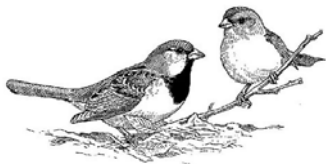
Game wardens have more important tasks on their day planners than going after every kid who picks up bird feathers in the yard or pasture. Priority is often geared towards catching poachers or other violators of our hunting, fishing, and recreation laws (i.e., drinking and boat-driving).

Typically, the general public is not aware of most of the wildlife protection laws (or most other laws for that matter!). I don't claim to be an expert on laws myself, but working for TPWD over the years has made me realize that most folks believe that only threatened or endangered species receive full protection -- this is incorrect.

Most often, they've not heard of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which protects all native species and their "parts" (it's not only for migratory bird species). Species-wise, only 1% of our state's birdlife is non-native, so the remaining 99% is native, like our three species of bluebirds, thus fully protected. We are all familiar with those non-native yet free-flying species like European Starling, Monk Parakeet, House (English) Sparrow, Rock (Dove) Pigeon, and so on.

House Sparrow Nests & Eggs – good ONLY for display

One way to benefit bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds is to save a House Sparrow nest with the eggs in order to teach others to identify the nest of this non-native pest that threatens the successful nestings of native birds. The House Sparrow must not be allowed to nest successfully. Its large bulky nest will eventually fill a nestbox. Be certain that it belongs to a House Sparrow before you remove a nest. If it's a nest other than a House Sparrow, it is illegal to remove the nest.



House Sparrow graphics
courtesy of
Cornell Laboratory
of Ornithology's
Home Study Course

Enforcement of game laws is a daunting task across this vast state. Game wardens have dozens of other duties as well. Our department employs about 500 state game wardens. There are far fewer federal game wardens working in Texas.

In my job, I am sometimes asked to confirm the identity of an illegally mounted bird or some bird "part" confiscated by our game wardens. One of the more memorable events was with an unidentified bird leg complete with talons. One of our game wardens saw this bird leg dangling from the rearview mirror of a moving car and pulled the driver over. The man was insistent that he cut it off of a roadkill bird years ago. By confirming the ID of the foot with museum specimens, it turned out to be a Crested Caracara. The man was charged because one cannot convince a law officer that indeed the "part" came from an already-dead bird. Same is true with feathers. So it's best to just look and not touch.

The best rule to play by is collect/keep no feathers or any other parts of native birds. The financial penalty could be a youngster's allowance, the family's going out to eat fund, or a good part of next month's car payment.

On a related note, accredited educational facilities have permits to allow them to keep and display mounted birds or bird parts for public education. Native Americans can acquire permits to allow them to have, for example, Bald Eagle or Golden Eagle feathers since these feathers are used in ancestral ceremonial attire.

For more details on Texas game laws, visit:
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/enforce
<<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/enforce>> .

Cliff Shackelford is the Nongame Ornithologist in the Wildlife Diversity Program at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in Austin. His duties are statewide and include all nongame species of birds native to this state. Cliff and Julie Shackelford are members of the Texas Bluebird Society.



LeAnn & Anthony Sharp, Utopia Arts & Crafts Fair

TBS BOOTHS

by LeAnn Sharp

In the last quarter of 2003, Texas Bluebird Society Board Members discovered a great way to educate the public about bluebirds and acquire new members at the same time. The idea was to set up and staff a TBS Booth at Nature Festivals, Birding Conventions, Arts & Crafts Fairs, Special Events or anywhere we thought people would be interested in hearing about bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. The booths did so well that the board voted to make booths a major focus in 2004. With funds available through those who add an additional donation to their dues, TBS purchased two more banners in order to ship a banner for each event. A free nestbox with the purchase of a membership will continue to be a special offer available at TBS Booths.

October 23&24, 2003

The Texas Ornithological Society asked TBS President Pauline Tom if TBS could set up an info table at its annual Convention in Uvalde. Since I (LeAnn Sharp) live near Uvalde, Pauline asked me if I'd be willing to do it. Knowing this was a chance to share bluebirds with birders, I gratefully accepted. TBS volunteer nestbox builder Brian Hetherington and his wife, Judy, drove more than 6 hours round-trip to bring me 38 TBS nestboxes. I signed up one new member and gave away one nestbox! The experience was well worth it. I talked to a lot of birders who didn't know much about bluebirds but were eager to get the TBS info and membership forms. TBS' presence there was good. Anytime TBS gets a chance to set up a booth at a birding event, it is good PR for TBS and bluebirds.

Nov. 1, 2003

Staring at 37 nestboxes after the TOS Convention, I decided to have a TBS Booth at our local "Utopia Fall Arts & Crafts Fair." Knowing I needed someone else, I enlisted the help of my husband, Anthony. People came across the lawn to see what we had when they glimpsed the TBS Banner. I made a poster with photos of bluebirds, nestbox trails and other cavity nesting birds. This was very helpful for the people to see. We stacked the 37 nestboxes and taped a sign, "**Free with purchase of membership**" People flocked to that word **Free** and we signed up 17 new members. Arts & Craft Fairs are a good place to have a TBS Booth. People who attend such occasions arrive with cash to spend and are frequently backyard birders. It is the perfect place to talk to people about the birds that build nests in nestboxes. We distributed info and answered questions from those who have bluebird nestboxes but no bluebirds yet. We gave them helpful suggestions on how to entice bluebirds to come to their property. Knowing exactly where to place a nestbox is very important!

December 6&7, 2003

The success at the Utopia Fair inspired Pauline Tom to have a TBS Booth at the annual Budafest Arts & Crafts Festival in downtown Buda the first weekend in December. She and her husband, Ron, brought back 27 new memberships from their two days. Pauline said, "LeAnn introduced the idea of doing 'One Nestbox' membership/nestbox exchanges at arts & crafts festivals. Just as she experienced in Utopia, we found that there was time at our booth to educate one-to-one and that most new members live in the community, so it provided the start of a mentoring relationship. Since the event was on the grass, we were able to erect nestboxes with nests placed in them (with the required permits). That worked well for education, and made it possible to demonstrate how to install a nestbox with the rebar/conduit method and how to monitor with a mechanic's mirror. With an large laminated color copy of the TBS male bluebird 'poster child,' we taught scores of people what a bluebird looks like. As we've seen before, most people in the Austin area have never seen a bluebird." Pauline feels that having a TBS Booth at an arts & crafts show is also a way of increasing membership in a targeted area, such as the region where we'll have a TBS Summer Symposium or Convention.

Pauline concludes, "If local members, even newbies, are recruited to man the booth (alongside a member with some knowledge or experience) this will involve the new member while mentoring. As it has been with almost all of our past TBS members, all but one or two new members from Budafest were putting up their first nestbox and many of these had never seen a bluebird. Our practice of coupling the receipt of a nestbox with a membership means that the new nestbox owners will receive a year of education in the form of our newsletter. This should increase the likelihood of the nestbox being installed and monitored correctly. At Budafest, I began networking with artists and photographers in hopes of bringing in donated artwork for auctions and raffles at future conventions or events. So, my report is that the Arts & Crafts Fair TBS Booth was a good fit with what the TBS Board decided our 2004 priorities to be: Education, Membership, Fundraising and, there was even a touch of getting ready for the NABS 2006 Convention.

WANTED: Stories of nestbox experiences for "Texas Blues", particularly from new members who obtained a free nestbox. Send by mail or email.

Come join in on the TBS Bluebird Booth fun!

Volunteer to staff a booth alongside our seasoned veterans. This is a great way to learn more about bluebirds, as well as to meet and share with other bluebird enthusiasts in your area. Check the list below and watch the TBS website for dates of upcoming booths. Email speakers@texasbluebirdsociety.org to volunteer ... or, show up and identify yourself with an offer to help.

March 4-5 - Lufkin Home Show TBS member Bill Petty saw the opportunity for a booth at this event and contacted TBS. TBS arranged for him to pick up nestboxes for a "One Nestbox" membership/free nestbox exchange and provided the electronic files for handouts. A TBS banner was shipped.

March 20 - Ellis County Master Gardeners New board member and Speakers Bureau coordinator Lysle Mockler obtained an invitation for TBS to be included at this event. She has made a 6-foot vertical display that will be used at future events.

April 24 - Wills Point, Kerrville & Kountze

Yes! Three events in a single day!!

Wills Point: TBS has had a Booth at the Annual Wills Point Bluebird Festival for 3 consecutive years. TBS Board members and other volunteers are dedicated in their quest to give anyone attending the Wills Point Bluebird Festival an opportunity to learn about bluebirds. They staff a TBS booth and the Bluebird Information Room. This year, for the first time, TBS will offer a bus tour (8:30, Noon, and 3:30) to our TBS Bluebird Trail at Lake Tawakoni State Park. We need many volunteers. Whether you can help for one hour or as much as the full day, please let us know so we can count on your support.

Kerrville: TBS sought the opportunity to have a booth at the Earth Day Festival at the Riverside Nature Center where we installed three nestboxes in February. Kerrville is an area where we are particularly seeking new members. If you live in this beautiful region, we hope you will volunteer to work alongside Ricky Walker and Dick & Chris Park.

Kountze: Charles Post will speak about bluebirds at 2:30 at the Birding in the Big Thicket Festival. Our plans to sponsor a festival booth should soon be "set in stone".

May 1 - Sebastopol House May Day, Seguin TBS was contacted when the coordinator read of our activities at other events. If available, please plan to help Ron & Pauline Tom this day.

July 8-10 - Ithaca, New York Expanding from being an info booth to teach about bluebirds and enlist members, this booth will promote Texas tourism and inspire bluebird enthusiasts to plan a trip to the NABS 2006 Convention!

October 2-3 - TP&W Expo in Austin

This will be TBS' 4th appearance (just as we're turning 3 years old) at the Annual Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo in Austin. Almost 50,000 people come through the gates to learn and discover what Texas has to offer in the way of nature and the great outdoors. This has been a wonderful opportunity for TBS to share bluebirds with thousands of eagerly interested nature enthusiasts. This year our booth will be larger. We need as many as possible to help at this incredible 2-day event.

Maybe you know of a special event suitable for a TBS booth and you're willing to be the local coordinator? TBS will work with you to determine the feasibility and to secure additional workers. Contact the TBS Board member in charge of coordinating Booths & Speakers at Events via speakers@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Bluebird Season is warming up!
Dan Hanan of Houston found two bluebird eggs in a nestbox at his property near Bastrop on February 12th. Mike Mathews, also of Houston, discovered his earliest nestlings ever near LaGrange on March 3rd.

To:

"Texas Blues" is the bi-monthly publication of

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Vice-President, Lamont Brown 940.891.4400

Annual memberships are \$10 **OR** \$15 for an entire household. Join or renew by mail or through our website.

Special Needs!

- A high quality **recording** of bluebirds
 - A series of **digital photos** of each day from hatching to fledging
- Respond to tbs@texasbluebirdsociety.org if you can help.

Special Thanks!

Thanks to **Carolyn and Curtis Crowder of Wills Point** for responding to the request for volunteers for **nestbox transportation** from Williamson County.