



# TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

Volume 3, Issue 2

April / May 2004

## IN THIS NEWSLETTER ...

If you've wondered "why are bluebird eggs blue?", this issue has the answer. Would you believe the color is applied, as it is with Easter eggs?.

If you've had difficulty completing the "Weekly Field Worksheet" that came as an insert in the previous issue, the instructions on page 3 are the missing puzzle piece.

If you're looking for a road trip the 4<sup>th</sup> weekend in April, consider the Wills Point Bluebird Festival. And, please consider helping us with this major undertaking.

If you know a young person who might be inspired to get started with bluebirding, read about Jordan Hutchins and maybe you'll be inspired to gift the young person with a TBS Youth Membership.

And, if you need a laugh, read the stories on the back page! Enjoy!

## Dates in 2004 for Annual Events

**April 24<sup>th</sup>** (4<sup>th</sup> Saturday in April), BLUEBIRD FESTIVAL, Wills Point

**August 21<sup>st</sup>** ("3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in August"), SUMMER SYMPOSIUM, Concan *includes optional bat watching tour*

**October 30<sup>th</sup>** ("last Saturday in October"), ANNUAL CONVENTION, Parrie Haynes Ranch in Ding Dong

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## **www.texasbluebirdsociety.org**

Our redesigned website is now active. You'll find new features, and new features will continue to be added. Many thanks to our volunteer webmaster, Mauro Liebelt, who lives in Washington (the state).

### NOTICE!

- faster, easier to navigate
- index for past issues of "Texas Blues"
- revised calendar format, with listings available in an "at a glance" table
- on-line membership and renewal

We would like to receive feedback and comments on the new design and new features. Please email us at [feedback@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:feedback@texasbluebirdsociety.org).

## **Wills Point Bluebird Festival ...**

**TBS moves up to front and center!!!!**

Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 8:30 - 5:00

The Texas Bluebird Society (TBS), by invitation from the Wills Point Bluebird Festival Committee, will be at the front center section of this year's Bluebird Festival. With space at the foot of the monument, we're expanding our festival repertoire!

- "Bluebird" Speaker every hour on the hour, 9:00 - 4:00.** Some talks will be on bluebirds and others will be on bluebird-related topics (i.e., mealworms, HeatShields)
- Sale of Bluebird Merchandise.** Bluebird t-shirts, hand-blown glass bluebirds and painted leather bluebird earrings
- "One Nestbox" membership / free nestbox exchange.** While supplies last, a free nestbox will be given in exchange for a household (\$15.00) membership.
- Display table.** Nests, handouts and more!
- Bluebird Tours.** TBS will conduct "every other" bluebird tour by bus that departs from the opposite end of the street. Our departure times are 8:30, 12:00 and 3:30.

**We need many more volunteers.** A volunteer does not need to be an expert on bluebirds. Rather, just be willing to spread "bluebird fever" by chatting about bluebirds. Listen to visitors' stories about bluebirds while selling merchandise, accepting memberships or handing out materials. If you have experiences with bluebirds to share, so much the better!

Contact Pauline Tom, [president@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:president@texasbluebirdsociety.org) or 512.268.5678 if you can help. Or, just show up and identify yourself as a volunteer.

Two years ago, the Texas Bluebird Society requested and received permission from the Wills Point Bluebird Festival Committee to operate a Bluebird Information Room, and we rented a sales booth. We were proud to be there.

Last year, there was often standing room only in the Information Room and crowds gathered around our sales booth. Festivalgoers enjoyed learning about bluebirds and talking about bluebirds.

This year, we're proud to be in a prominent spot. This puts bluebirds in a prominent spot!

*Wills Point is a small town on Old Highway 80 that is fifty miles east of Dallas and 45 miles west of Tyler.*

# WHY ARE BLUEBIRD EGGS BLUE?

By Megan Miller



Like so many strange and wonderful things in Nature, the color of bluebird eggs is driven by genetics. "Blue genes!", you might say. (Or you might not. Perhaps we'd better just continue...)

A young female bluebird hatches with the ability to start producing ova. Interestingly, she only has one ovary – the left one. It is believed that the right ovary, while present, does not develop in order to save weight in flight. As she matures, she begins to produce the yolk that will enshroud and nourish the embryo as it ultimately incubates beneath her

When sexually mature at about one year, she may mate with more than one male per breeding season. The ova are fertilized and travel through the oviduct. Albumen (egg white) is added in layers, and chalazae form. Chalazae are specialized "ropes" of albumen whose function is to stabilize the egg within the shell. The shell is created last, also in layers, and during its formation glands add the familiar blue pigment. The pigment, known as biliverdin, is created from bile.

Here's where genetics step in - not all Eastern Bluebirds are capable of adding the pigment. It's estimated that as much as 5% of Eastern Bluebird eggs emerge white. Shell color does not indicate whether or not a female chick will herself be a white egg layer or a blue egg layer, as white egg layers do not regularly pass the gene anomaly to their offspring. Nor does shell color predict the birth of a white bluebird (sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it?). White eggs and blue eggs both generally contain healthy blue birds.

Albinism does occur in bluebirds, however. One well-documented case was sighted in Maryland in 1999, although some reports say that it was not a true albino as it had dark eyes and legs. Albino birds are at special risk in the wild – they are easily seen by predators and tend to have impaired hearing and eyesight, and poor feathers.

But to return to the question, "why are bluebird eggs blue"? Some authorities say that the blue color blends well and helps hide the eggs in the dappled light of a nesting cavity. A 7-year old authority of my acquaintance says they're blue because there are so few of them. Whatever the reason, blue eggs are another reason we love bluebirds.

*Megan Miller of Crawford is a new contributor to "Texas Blues". Megan joined the Texas Bluebird Society last year through the "One Nestbox" membership / nestbox exchange offer. She works as an Environmental Inspector for the City of Waco; is a Texas Master Naturalist and an aspiring writer. The next issue of "Texas Blues" will feature Megan's article on bluebird fidelity (or perhaps is it infidelity? Find out!).*



**Jordan Hutchins**, 14, of **Aransas Pass** is one of our youngest TBS members. And, the high school freshman is an active TBS volunteer. Alongside his grandfather, **Lee Hutchins of Sinton**, he has built dozens of nestboxes. In March, Jordan demonstrated how to build a nestbox to the **Audubon Corpus Christi Outdoor Club** when Lee was the featured speaker. During recent weeks he has worked with his grandfather and **Richard Lockhart** to install about 30 nestboxes at the **Bob and Bessie Welder Park** in Sinton. His grandfather says, "Besides being a great grandson he is just a good young man."

THANKS, JORDAN, for making an impact in our endeavor, "Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time."



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR "WEEKLY FIELD WORKSHEET"

Prepare a separate "Weekly Field Worksheet" for each nestbox. The worksheet was inserted in the previous issue and it is available on our website, [www.texasbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.texasbluebirdsociety.org)

### TO ESTIMATE THE DATE OF THE FIRST EGG:

Most cavity nesting birds lay one egg a day, with incubation beginning on the day or the day before the last egg is laid.

**To determine the date of the 1<sup>st</sup> egg:** (After a nest is built and before the egg-laying phase is completed, it is advisable to monitor late in the morning or in the afternoon, since egg-laying usually takes place in the early morning.) Record on the "Weekly Field Worksheet" the number of eggs and the date when eggs are discovered in weekly monitoring. Go backwards on a calendar one day for each egg, and subtract one additional day to determine the approximate date of the first egg. Record this date on your worksheet.

### TO PROJECT THE ESTIMATED HATCH DATE:

Each species has a "standard" number of days (usually a range) for incubation. Refer to the "incubation" column in the table below, "INCUBATION AND NESTLING PERIODS OF SELECTED CAVITY-NESTING BIRDS."

**To determine when to expect the eggs to hatch, count forward on a calendar, one day for each day of incubation, starting with the date the last egg was laid.** On your "Weekly Field Worksheet," record the earliest possible projected hatch date. If your nestbox is nearby, check as often as once a day if you want to record the actual hatch date (and have the joy of witnessing a hatching emerging from a cracked egg)

### TO PROJECT THE ESTIMATED DATE OF FLEDGE:

Each species has a "standard" number of days (a range) between hatching and "fledging" (leaving the nest). Refer to the "nestling" column in the table "INCUBATION AND NESTLING PERIODS OF SELECTED CAVITY-NESTING BIRDS."

**To determine when birds might fledge:** Count forward on a calendar from the day the eggs hatched, and record the date on your "Weekly Field Worksheet." As the earliest possible fledge date nears, open the nestbox very carefully to prevent nestlings from jumping out before they are ready to fly.

When the nestlings fledge, record the fledge date in the "notes" column. With this data, you can determine how many days it took for the nestlings to fledge.

### TO COMPLETE THE "SEASON SUMMARY" FORM

At the end of the nesting season, compile totals and record the data on the "Season Summary" form. Then, if you have access to the Internet, enter the data in the "Data Collection" section of our website, [www.texasbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.texasbluebirdsociety.org) If you do not have access to the Internet, mail your "Season Summary" form to TBS Data Collection, P.O. Box 40868, Austin TX 78704

The "Weekly Field Worksheet" is not submitted to the Texas Bluebird Society. It is used for personal records and to tabulate a "Season Summary"

INCUBATION AND NESTLING PERIODS OF SELECTED CAVITY-NESTING BIRDS		
<b>Species</b>	<b>Incubation</b>	<b>Nestling</b>
Ash-throated Flycatcher	14-16 days	13-17 days
Bewick's Wren	12-16 days	14-16 days
Carolina Wren	12-16 days	10-16 Avg. 12-14 days
Black-crested Titmouse	12-14 days	15-18 days
Tufted Titmouse	12-14 Avg. 13 days	15-18 days
Carolina Chickadee	11-15 days	13-19 Avg. 13-17 days
Eastern Bluebird	11-19 Avg. 14 days	15-20 days
Western Bluebird	12-18 days	18-25 days
Downy Woodpecker	12 days	18-25 days
Prothonotary Warbler	12-14 days	9 - 11 days

The Texas Bluebird Society solicits and gathers records from Texas nestbox landlords, regardless of whether or not the individual is a member of the Texas Bluebird Society.

As our organization continues to grow (**we have just recorded Membership #500**), it is becoming increasingly burdensome to send out printed newsletters via normal mail. Printing, folding, addressing and mailing is requiring resources that could be otherwise directed to nestbox programs, speakers bureau, etc. We realize that some members do not have access to the Internet and we will certainly continue to provide them a printed newsletter. Others have opted for the printed newsletter while having reliable Internet access. Would you reconsider? What can we do to make the process adequately attractive? Please send us an email or a letter with suggestions.

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## from the TransTexas Nestbox Network

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### "Bluebird Mobile"

**Susan Vaughan, Northwest Houston**

My boxes are in a small suburban pasture in NW Houston that I use for daily turn-out for my elder statesman pony. Each day when pony is out I sit in my truck with my dogs and watch my horse graze and observe all "doings" in regards to the nestboxes.

I have noticed the bluebird pair observing me!!

Weeks ago I would notice them perched on tree limbs close to where I was sitting in my truck. I felt they were watching me rather intently, and I was hoping they were thinking, "Hey Lady, Thanks for the nestboxes!"

Anyhoo ... their behavior went on for many days. Then, in mid-March I decided to hop on my pony bareback and ride around. I had rolled down my windows in my truck - and I would ride by mystified.

The bluebirds were quite interested in my truck. They flew in the driver's side and out the passenger window. Then, one perched on the steering wheel! How funny!

Of course, they perched to look at the side mirror and I have "bluebird poop" as evidence!

I might add that my truck is blue ... almost the same color as a bluebird! Needless to say, my truck has been renamed "The Bluebird Mobile."

### "Watch the Birdie"

**Ed Melson, Yoakum** (*Ed included a blurry close-up photo of a flying object shaped like an airplane.*)

Oh his ranch near Yoakum, my son, Ben Melson caught pictures on his motion and heat activated camera that is installed near a deer feeder intended to photograph trophy deer. He will normally get pictures of wild hogs, deer, raccoons, etc. both day and night. And, then came an Eastern Bluebird. It took my grandson, Benjamin, to identify it as a bluebird. Ben and I were thinking, "hawk".

The camera that captured two bluebird photographs is set for a 10-minute rest period between photos. Ben has nestboxes on the place and there is one with four young birds in it in the vicinity of the deer feeder.

To:

"Texas Blues" is the bi-monthly publication of

**The Texas Bluebird Society**  
**P.O. Box 40868**  
**Austin TX 78704**

**[www.texasbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.texasbluebirdsociety.org)**  
**[info@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@texasbluebirdsociety.org)**

President, Pauline Tom 512.268.5678 (home)  
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.

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### What is the "TransTexas Nestbox Network"?

A. The "TransTexas Nestbox Network" is comprised of all nestboxes associated in any way with Texas Bluebird Society. It includes individual nestboxes in backyards as well as nestboxes that are part of extensive bluebird trails. Each individual nestbox is important in "Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time".

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### Texas Bluebird Society - 2003 Budget / Results

	Budget - Full Year	% of Total	Actual - Full Year (Through 12/31/03)	% of Total	Variance (Budget - YTD)	% of Budget Received / Expended
<b>Income:</b>						
Memberships	\$ 4,000.00	67%	\$ 4,355.00	39%	\$ 355.00	109%
Donations / Grants	\$ 1,000.00	17%	\$ 3,026.00	27%	\$ 2,026.00	303%
Fundraising	\$ 1,000.00	17%	\$ 3,748.55	34%	\$ 2,748.55	375%
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 6,000.00</b>		<b>\$ 11,129.55</b>		<b>\$ 5,129.55</b>	<b>185%</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>						
Education	\$ 2,500.00	42%	\$ 3,379.25	49%	\$ (879.25)	135%
Scientific (Nestboxes)	\$ 1,500.00	25%	\$ 2,035.39	29%	\$ (535.39)	136%
Fundraising	\$ 750.00	13%	\$ 25.60	0%	\$ 724.40	3%
Administration	\$ 425.00	7%	\$ 780.09	11%	\$ (355.09)	184%
Other (Loan Payments & Donations)	\$ 750.00	13%	\$ 702.58	10%	\$ 47.42	94%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 5,925.00</b>		<b>\$ 6,922.91</b>		<b>\$ (997.91)</b>	<b>117%</b>
<b>2003 Gain (+) / Loss (-)</b>	<b>\$ 75.00</b>		<b>\$ 4,206.64</b>			
<b>Year-end Bank Balance</b>					<b>\$ 7,549.75</b>	