

President's Column

"Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time" When five charter board members developed our slogan as we sat under the oaks in my backyard almost four years ago, we envisioned a map showing TBS members and nestboxes in Texas.

That dream becomes a reality this year!

The TransTexas Nestbox Network (TTNN) Online Data Collection System opens August 1st on the TBS website.

TBS asks each member to submit a "Season Summary" with information about their nestbox(es) and the season's nestings. Each person's data is of value. Over the years, TBS will compile and interpret data about cavity-nesting birds in Texas.

The more records the better! Any Texan may enter their records at our website. (TBS membership is not required.) Please spread the word!

With our "on-line system," dots will represent the nestbox(es) in each zipcode, showing progress towards "Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time."

For those who do not have access to the Internet, a paper copy can be mailed in and a TBS volunteer will enter the data.

TBS will furnish a compilation of Texas results to the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). Our "Texas" segment is part of the "TransContinental Bluebird Trail."

Give it a try this year. Enter what you can. You need not have detailed records to participate.

Happy birding!

Pauline Tom, president

"Bluebird Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time"

Texas Bluebird Society
P. O. Box 40868
Austin, Texas 78704

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House sparrows are bluebird killers

I actually witnessed the end of an attack. I opened a nestbox to see a bluebird and a house sparrow in there, both so exhausted that they could not fly away when I looked in. The bluebird didn't move at all, the house sparrow was panting, and staring me down. I shut the box, got a glove to stuff in the hole, and got a plastic bag to put over the entire nestbox. When I opened up, neither bird flew until I actually reached in. I got one bird in one corner of the bag and the other in another corner. The bluebird died of his wounds, which included the typical pecked scalp, a punctured eye and a bill that was essentially shredded by the house sparrow's stronger beak. I never expected to catch a sparrow in the act! ... Kate Oswald Arnold...100 miles NE of Dallas

More on house sparrows: NJ Audubon Society website at <http://www.njaudubon.org/NatureNotes/Video.html>.

Proposed Mission Statement:

Texas Bluebird Society promotes the enjoyment, understanding, and restoration of bluebirds

Texas Bluebird Society Board of Directors

Cheryl Anderson; John Cys; Lee Hutchins; Lysle Mockler; Charles Post; Mike Scarbrough;
Pauline Tom; LeAnn Sharp; Dan Hanan; Sandy Coggins; Mary Leyendecker (editor, Texas Blues)

North American Bluebird Society Convention

Events last month in Asheville, North Carolina, took a turn for Texas as the TBS delegation's multi-media presentation and song wowed 200 in the crowd.

Many couples pre-registered on the spot! Make your room reservations now and be eligible for a gift.

Kudos to volunteer media professionals Edith Castillo of Mexico (genfactor2040@gmail.com) and Kenny Epstein of Austin (Doctor Audio, 512.707.8561; <http://www.kbeartx.com>). See the great job they did for TBS!

Download the TBS multimedia presentation and convention song at www.NABS2006.com

Mealworms can be ordered online!

TBS encourages dual memberships. NABS gives a 15% discount on mealworm purchases to their members, and a coupon for 1,000 free mealworms to new members! Details are at www.nabluebirdsociety.org.



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TEXAS

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society



NABS 2006 announced for San Antonio, Texas

By Mary Leyendecker, NABS 2006 Journalist

Batty with bluebird lyrics to “Deep in the Heart of Texas,” approximately 15% of the attendees at the NABS 2005 Convention quickly phoned for lodging reservations at the San Antonio Hilton, the host hotel for the 2006 North American Bluebird Society Convention.

Lodging reservations for the April 26 - 30, 2006 Convention couldn't be easier for early birds: just dial 1.800.HILTONS or visit www.hiltonsanantonioap.com.

The “convention code” for the \$89 (plus tax) room rate is “NABS.” (Early lodging reservations help secure needed meeting space for the convention.)

Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) president and founder Pauline Tom wowed the 2005 NABS crowd at Asheville, North Carolina, when she launched a Texas-sized “Red, White & Bluebirds” media presentation developed by volunteer media professionals and musicians*.

Colorful convention plans were announced, including a Flag Ceremony. One person from each state and province represented in the NABS organization is cordially invited to provide a 3'x5' flag of their state or province for opening ceremonies next April in the luxurious and travel-friendly headquarters hotel. To secure flag rights for your home state, e-mail flags@NABS2006.com or contact Pauline at 512.268.5678.

TBS issued a “call for presenters,” asking NABS members and associates to share expertise and deliver practical and educational information at convention. To submit a presentation proposal, e-mail program@NABS2006.com.

Among those already confirmed are June Osborne and Gary McCracken and Keith Kridler, powerhouse avian experts/authors with international reputations.

Field trips to world-famous bat caves in Central Texas, Warbler Woods, Bluebird Hill Trail on Indian Blanket Ranch, and other birding locales in and near San Antonio are planned.

Mail donations for the silent auction, auction, and door prizes to NABS 2006 Auction, c/o The BirdHouse, 1865 Boyd Road, Azle, TX 76020 Questions? Phone Mindy Mitchell, 817.980.7986.

Sponsorships (cash and in-kind donations) are needed. Sponsors, please contact sponsors@NABS2006.com or Pauline Tom, 512.268.5678.

NABS 2006 offers TBS members early on-line registration starting August 15th at www.NABS2006.com. Registration opens nationwide September 1st.

Lyrics: Cher www.BluebirdNut.com
Recording Artist: Kenny Epstein
Tune: Deep in the Heart of Texas

NABS 2006 CONVENTION SONG Sing along!

The stars at night, are big and bright,
deep in the heart of Texas,
The prairie sky is wide and high,
deep in the heart of Texas,
Up high above, a sight we love,
deep in the heart of Texas,
The Bluebirds fly, up in that sky
deep in the heart of Texas

In San Antone, Fiesta's home
deep in the heart of Texas,
We'll have our share of Tex-Mex fare
deep in the heart of Texas
Come join our mix, for NABS '06
deep in the heart of Texas,
We'll sing to you, “Red White and Blue-
Birds in the Heart of Texas”

The rich perfume of wildflow'r blooms
deep in the heart of Texas
Will make our meet in springtime sweet
deep in the heart of Texas
See Red-tailed hawks on River Walks
deep in the heart of Texas
With Freetail bats, and Ring-tailed cats
deep in the heart of Texas

Come be the guest of TBS
deep in the heart of Texas
As Bluebirds' friend, you should attend
deep in the heart of Texas
Come join our song, and sing along
deep in the heart of Texas
We'll show we care, for Bluebirds there,
deep in the heart of Texas!

* **Download the multimedia
presentation and convention song
at www.NABS2006.com**

Wills Point Bluebird Festival was wonderful

Pauline Tom, Texas Bluebird Society President
Wind is better than rain! Mindy Mitchell, Charles and Jackie Post, and my husband, Ron, and I had a wonderful time April 20. Many current and prior members told about “their” bluebirds. People like the TBS data collection initiative; many took a new Nestbox Observation Worksheet. The 2006 Wills Point Bluebird Festival, April 22, falls the weekend before NABS Convention. We need a TBS member to coordinate a “membership/nestbox exchange” booth at the WPBF front entrance. Please step forward and take the reins! Contact: 512.268.5678.

1st Call - ANNUAL CONVENTION

TBS Annual Convention
Saturday, October 29, 2005
Cibolo Nature Center, Boerne

TP&W Expo - Volunteers needed Expo is Oct. 1-2 in Austin. Visit: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo/. Volunteers are needed to help at the TBS booth. For details, contact Ann Thames, ann@texasbluebirdsociety.org, 979.278.3053.

Nestbox builders see first bluebirds, eggs

After two years of voluntarily constructing hundreds of nestboxes for bluebirds, although he'd never seen one, Brian Hetherington visited Ann Henderson's ranch... and saw dozens. TBS' other volunteer nestbox builder, Bob Hauck, saw his first bluebird eggs earlier this season.

Secrets from inside the nestbox

By Megan Miller, TBS member, Crawford

The female bluebird surveys her work. It's a good clutch. Five light blue eggs, nestled in soft dry grasses in the secure confines of the nestbox. The hardest part is over, except for the feeding and raising that will come later. Now she just needs to keep them safe and warm.

For safety, she'll have to rely on trying to be quiet and unnoticed, and trust to the guardianship of her mate. Warmth, on the other hand, she can do something about...

Now that the clutch is laid, hormonal signals lead her to pluck out a bare area on her breast that will come in direct contact with her eggs. This area, called a brood patch or incubation patch, allows the heat from the blood in her breast to transfer to the clutch. This heat transfer keeps the eggs at perfect incubation temperature.

Ornithologists at Cornell believe that the average temperature of the clutch during incubation is 34 degrees Celsius (93.2 degrees F). This temperature can fall rapidly if she leaves the nest, but she seems to know this and times her excursions. Bluebirds in cooler areas make shorter forays outside the nestbox than do those in warmer locations.

Her mate will not create a brood patch. He may sit on the eggs when she leaves for a short time, but without it he is not an effective incubator. He will stand guard when she leaves however, and will also bring her tasty morsels so that she doesn't need to leave more often than necessary. On some occasions he may sit with her in the nestbox overnight.

After approximately 13 days, depending upon the weather, the chicks appear. They come into the world virtually naked, and she remains sitting on them and warming them during the first few days of their lives. This time is called “brooding”, and the nestlings mostly spend it cozily asleep beneath her brood patch. Dad continues to bring food, now choosing softer items that can be fed to the chicks as well as to Mom. By day three, the nestlings have started to grow soft down, and the skin darkens as the beginnings of feathers develop beneath. As they become better able to insulate themselves, their mother spends less time sitting on them. The quiet broody period is over, and there are five hungry mouths to feed. When she does venture out, she takes with her scraps of eggshell and the sacs of fecal material that the nestlings have begun to produce. (For a short time after their hatching, she may eat either of these herself for the nutrients they contain). She will deposit them far from the nest, so as not to alert predators.

The nestlings, for their part, also know instinctively not to make too much noise. But as soon as a parent's head appears in the circle of sky that leads to the outside world, the clamor begins. Mere balls of fluff, their oversized yellow mouths are easily seen by their parents in the half-light of the nestbox. (Especially noisy ones sometimes get more grub(s)). Gaining weight rapidly, they soon fledge, leaving home in a matter of weeks. *Sigh* – they grow up so fast...

When the breeding season is over, the missing feathers from the female's brood patch will come back with the molt. It seems that Moms of every species make sacrifices that are little noticed or appreciated by their young. All we can say is **we hope you and your brood enjoyed a Happy Mother's Day (and Father's Day)!**

Editor's Note: Megan viewed “Bluebirds Inside the Nestbox” (15-minute run time) when researching for this article. TBS has several copies on DVD to loan for educational purposes.

NABS 2006

“Red, White & Bluebirds”

Needs for NABS 2006 - volunteering@NABS2006.com

TBS members can help work out any kinks in the on-line registration system by participating in “advance registration” starting August 15th at www.NABS2006.com. Registration opens to the general public on Sept. 1st. Early registrants get 1st choice on field trips!

TBS posts updated “virtual opportunities on www.volunteermatch.org.

Current needs include:

- Coordinate and supervise Volunteers
- Hand address invitations
- Acquire donated items for auctions
- Provide audio/visual services during convention

What kind of talent or expertise can you provide?

Contact Pauline, 512.268.5678.

3rd Annual

Summer Bluebird Symposium

Birdwatching! Program! Silent Auction!

**9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday
Aug. 20 and 21, 2005**

**Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge
9601 Fossil Foad, Ft. Worth**

Featured Speaker - KEITH KRIDLER

TBS Member, \$10 / General Public, \$20

Info: 817.444.8581 or Azlebird@aol.com

Groesbeck Nestbox Trail

Carol Langley, HOT Certified Master Naturalist - March 2005

I am writing this article coming off of “a natural high,” so please forgive me if I seem overly enthusiastic.

Being a master naturalist, I wanted to work on a project close to home that would be something that would fit into a hectic schedule (i.e., single mom, work, grad school). I’m a nurse in a busy emergency department and have three teenagers.

One way that I unwind is to go to the park here in Groesbeck to study or to just get away. I have noticed that crows are mostly around and thought how beautiful it would be to see a bluebird here.

Until last year at a training session, I had never seen a bluebird. (Thought that they were the same as a Blue Jay.) So, wha-la! The conception of the Groesbeck Nestbox Trail.

Last fall I gained permission from the City of Groesbeck to place the boxes and then asked for approval from my

How's NABS 2006 coming along?

SOME FIELD TRIPS

“Warbler Woods” Don & Susan Schaezler, TBS members, will open their ranch (“Warbler Woods”) near Schertz to NABS field trips. This 126 acre family ranch is a bird and wildlife refuge. Varied habitat, near the convergence of three ecological regions, supports a diverse plant community that attracts, hosts, feeds, and protects a wide diversity of wildlife. Bird list includes over 230 species (eastern and western birds), including 36 species of Warblers. Growing lists of butterflies and dragonflies. WW is “fairly” handicapped accessible.

Indian Blanket Ranch and Bat Flight Tour will include a field trip to the Texas Hill Country River Region on Wednesday, April 26. Visit Bluebird Hill Trail. Guides to share local knowledge. You will see and be able to admire, identify, photograph/sketch native Texas plants, wildflowers, birds, butterflies, hummingbirds; much more. Participants will enjoy a great Country Style dinner at Neal’s Cafe; also, a film of the bats inside the Frio Cave and Q&A on bats. Book this tour and witness 12 million Mexican free-tailed Bats (largest population open to the public) as they ascend from the Frio Cave into the evening sky at sunset. Organizers say more fun will be packed into this tour but just with the Bats alone, you’ll enjoy an experience of a lifetime!

SOME FEATURED SPEAKERS

Dr. Gary McCracken - “Bats of Central Texas” during the Saturday evening banquet.

June Osborne - Poetic word presentation with photos of birds and natural beauty of Central Texas following Opening Ceremony Thursday afternoon.

Keith Kridler - “Bluebirding in Texas” on Saturday morning. Keith has issued a CALL FOR IMAGES of bluebirds nesting in far South Texas, West Texas, and Panhandle. Send to: photos@texasbluebirdsociety.org. Contact TBS Photo Librarian John Cys at 940.691.5702 for details and form granting TBS permission to use.

Rich Kostecke - Story of the Brown-headed Cowbird traps at Fort Hood on Saturday.

naturalist group for the project.

Clay Tracy, the extension officer, has offered his assistance. Sharon and Bob Kersten, TBS Bluebird Ambassadors, are in my naturalist group. What a hook-up!

Ann Thames, a Texas Bluebird Society Ambassador from Carmine (whom I’d never met), delivered five boxes to Ft. Parker State Park and I picked them up.

The Kerstens met me at the park in Groesbeck and placed the nestboxes in areas which were open for the bluebirds or native species and areas that were mower-friendly. Imagine my surprise when placing the last box, a bluebird sat nearby.