



TEXAS Blues

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

TBS annual convention is Saturday, October 29, at Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne

TBS annual convention is Saturday, October 29, at Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne (NW of San Antonio and near New Braunfels) Registration form enclosed. Registration fee includes box lunch and snacks. Registration is \$10.00 for members ... \$25.00 for new members (includes membership, registration, and starter nestbox) ... \$20.00 for non-members.

SCHEDULE FOR SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29:

9:00 Nature / Bluebird Trail Walk, led by Dick Park
10:00 Bill Lindemann, Guest Speaker
10:45 Break / Silent Auction
Donated items & gift certificates needed for silent auction
11:00 Season Summary & Highlights Discussion
Noon Lunch / NABS 2006 Information / Silent Auction
12:45 Annual Meeting: Elections / Recognitions
1:00 Richard Heilbrun, TP&W, Guest Speaker
1:50 Silent Auction Ends
2:00 Farewell

“Wildlife Valuations” by Richard Heilbrun



Richard Heilbrun

Richard Heilbrun will describe how, as our state continues to become more and more fragmented, the Texas Hill Country will especially feel the brunt of the impact.

Once rich with wildlife, this area draws development at an increasingly alarming rate. Traditionally, land use in Texas involved producing a commodity, such as livestock, hay, or agricultural foodstuffs.

Richard is an urban wildlife biologist

with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and will be speaking about the Agricultural tax program and Wildlife valuation process.

Today, more landowners purchase properties for recreation, and prefer to provide habitat for wildlife. State law allows today's landowners and land buyers to perform certain management activities for the benefit of wildlife. These management practices, when approved

Please see *Richard Heilbrun*, page 4

“Hill Country Nature” by Bill Lindemann

The word that best describes Texas Hill Country nature is “diversity,” although “beauty” would be a close second.

Located in the center of our large state, the Hill Country, or more definitively the Edwards Plateau, is where east meets west and north meets south, a virtual mixing bowl of those regions.

Ecologically this region lies in the middle of both the rainfall and temperature ranges (50+ to < 10 inches average and 56 to 74 degrees mean, respectively). The area has been influenced by geological processes spanning more than a billion years.

This diversity of wildlife is greatly influenced by the native plants representing both wet and arid tolerant species as well as cool temperate and sub-tropical species. Many eastern and western bird ranges overlap here, while seasonal migrations bring in both northern and southern species. Similarly, butterfly, dragonfly and mammal populations reflect diversity based on their compatibility with the region's climate and vegetation.

Bill will introduce many of the characters that live in the Hill Country, and discuss the factors that influence the diversity of wildlife found there. Nature's diversity and beauty help make the Hill Country the state's most popular area for visitation and residence.



Bill Lindemann

Cibolo Nature Center - TBS convention site, Oct. 29

One hundred acres of protected lands in the Texas Hill Country at Boerne. Four distinct ecosystems. Trails and streams and quiet groves. A place where nature can have its way. A place where we can watch and learn. The Cibolo Nature Center is for field trips, family outings and private moments. Enjoy the fellowship of others who relish the gifts of nature. Participate in our workshops, join our cadre of volunteers, attend our informal concerts on the lawn or spend a morning in quiet contemplation. Welcome to the Cibolo Nature Center www.cibolo.org

Snake poses mysterious problem in nestbox

Situation posed by Dan Hanan, 35 miles SE of Austin, TX

A snake, I assume it was a Texas rat snake, got my last nest of the season baby Bluebirds; they were one or two days away from fledging at the time of previous monitoring. The nestbox was mounted on a 6 foot high, greased, 1.5 inch diameter EMT pole. The box had a second entrance hole on the back wall where the babies may have been able to escape. The snake left a 1.5 inch wide greasy trail up to the front entrance hole, grease inside the box, and grease in various other places. This nestbox was made earlier this year with the Texas heat in mind. It had an attic space (or a double roof with space in between), which had 0.625 inch vent spanning the front and back sides of the box. The box also had two 0.625 inch ventilation slots, one above the door and the other on the opposite back wall just below the ceiling. It appears from the grease, that the snake went through attic vents from front to back and maybe through the vents above the door, as well as going through the front entrance hole. A thought as I write this: maybe the babies had fledged and the snake was hunting everywhere, including the attic, for them. There have been several times in the past where a snake has climbed a nestbox pole days after the babies have fledged. From the 1.5 inch greasy trail up to the box entrance, I would guess this last snake would be bigger than an inch in diameter. But could a snake of that size, or bigger, squeeze through the 0.625 inch high ventilation slot?

Response offered by Keith Kridler, Mt. Pleasant, TX

Normally a snake that eats baby bluebirds just about to fledge from inside the nestbox and the box has 1&1/2" round entrance holes then the snake will be staying in the box for a day or two while it digests the baby birds to the point it can escape back out of the round hole. The colder the temperatures the slower digestive juices work and the longer the snake will remain in the nestbox after eating LARGE baby birds. Eggs or young birds less than about 8 days old or just a single large baby bird will not stop a snake from leaving the nestbox through an entrance hole. If the snake had eaten the baby birds then it would have been days before it could have crawled through the 5/8" ventilation slots. It seems to me the snake scented the old nest or simply was back making rounds of its territory, checking out cavities that in the past provided food and blundered through the grease. When it found the empty nest it began serious efforts to remove the grease from its skin scraping off much of the grease by squeezing through the ventilation slots. (My son Shawn is an inexperienced mechanic and yesterday he scraped grease and oil off his hands on his pants! He is NOW experienced!) I don't think snakes learn to avoid grease if they are hungry any more than some dogs will avoid a skunk after being sprayed. Snakes encounter hydrocarbons every time they cross a highway. They also encounter hydrocarbons every time they encounter weed killer sprayed on fence lines or along power lines/pipe lines. They also run into hydrocarbons where home owners sprayed paint or insecticides in their yards or where farmers spray their crops. Grease applied to mounting poles allows you to track what predator went up the pole and what they did when they got to the box. This lets you know you have a problem and how common it is. Four-inch PVC pile will

stop "some" snakes "some" of the time but it will NOT stop ALL snakes ALL of the time! The larger diameter of a smooth mounting pole will stop smaller snakes that cannot constrict around the pole and inch their way to the nestbox. As PVC pipe ages in sunshine it slowly oxidizes losing that slick outer layer and will at some point become rough enough to allow predators to climb to the nestbox. Jack Finch found that perfectly smooth 4" PVC pipe (test it by using a silk handkerchief rubbed up the surface of the pipe, if silk does not snag on bumps at all it is considered "smooth") with about a 36" ring of "sharp" crushed masonry sand spread around the base of the PVC mounting pole would keep snakes from climbing the PVC. It seems that enough sharp sand would cling to the belly scales of the snakes to prevent their getting a grip on the PVC pipe. This only worked if the sand was kept dry, something we cannot duplicate for the entire nesting season at every nestbox. Sharp masonry sand is mined where it was crushed either naturally or by machines and will have jagged edges and sharp angles on a majority of the grains of sand. River masonry sand is mined/dredged from streams or ocean beaches where it has rolled and tumbled for thousands of miles and under a microscope the individual grains of sand will mostly be tiny smooth oval or nearly round grit. For high strength concrete or multi-story masonry jobs you MUST use "sharp" sand as the points and angles resist shear pressures when embedded in a cement, sand or gravel mix. Before "redi-mix" concrete mixes were available you used 35 shovels of "sharp" sand, 15 shovels of "crushed" gravel and 7 shovels of Portland cement. A gallon of concrete mix around a metal mounting pole resists theft of the nestbox and mounting pole "Some" of the time.

Fire Ants: major threat

Keith Kridler, Mt. Pleasant, Texas

Others have given good advice and good observations about the many species of ants that might be in your nestboxes. There are several species of native fire ants and a couple of imported species and some of these are still spreading out following people and their water use into new areas of colonization. Fire ants prefer to nest where the grass is short and there is sunlight striking the moist ground and where winters are fairly mild. They utilize the heat from the sun to help speed up the growth of their eggs and young and they build a mound above ground level during cool or wet periods of the year and carry their young back and forth between the mounds or their deep tunnels or chambers depending on the temperature. They are EXTREMELY prolific and by sheer numbers they need an enormous amount of food and prefer oily or fatty foods to grains or sugars. To test for fire ant numbers in your yard or along your trail you should set up a grid where you place a fried corn chip every 75 feet and mark this with one of those plastic flag on a wire marking tags. Set these out either at dawn or two hours till dusk. If 70% of these chips have fireants feeding on them in your test area within 30 minutes then you have a normal amount of fire ants. Remember that fire ants feed on all types of slow moving insects especially those like cicadas, moths, beetles and butterflies that are helpless as they go from a pupa stage to the adult stage. Young deer (fawns) are especially at danger as they will lie motionless and allow fire ants to cover them and often get blinded by the ants as they sting and bite off pieces near their eyes, nose, navel and mouth. Turtle, snake and lizard eggs are eaten by fire ants as they lack the hard calcium layer. Fire ants climb trees in search of food and even cross over power poles coated with or oozing creosote, penta or

NABS 2006

“Red, White & Bluebirds”

Register early for the April 26-30 NABS Convention in San Antonio. Early registrants get 1st choice on fabulous field trips.

Register on-line at www.NABS2006.com or find a registration form inserted in your mailed complimentary issue of “Bluebird.”

The Texas Bluebird Society gives an “Early Bird Gift Package” to those who register before November 1, 2005.

Upon check-in, each “Early Bird” will receive 37 complimentary prize drawing coupons and a convention t-shirt. The first 370 registrants will receive in the mail an Alamo potholder. Every 37th “Early Bird” registrant will receive a ceramic Alamo bank.

Needs for NABS 2006 - volunteering@NABS2006.com or phone Pauline, 512.268.5678.

Fire Ants (from page 2)

treated with other “green” wood preservatives. Grease in most areas of the south will quickly “gas off” and harden or get dust or leaves blown into the sticky surface and become hard enough for the ants to cross over in just a few days. Fire ants will actually carry material and build a bridge over an obstruction or cover up poison or they will cover up a large food source to feed in safety below the ground they just created. Bluebirds are in the nestbox for just about three weeks. If the nest is not removed the old feather sheaths (white dandruff in the old nest) provide great food for the fire ants in addition to the insect parts and old bird droppings in old nests. Fire ants lay down a scent trail to any food they find and will swarm to the location just as honeybees will to a good sugar source during a drought! Fire ants overpower termites and can wipe out and eat an entire colony in a dead tree or in the walls of a house. Fire ants can wipe out a weak honeybee hive or bumble bee, hornet colony or even wasp nests. They chew into mud dauber nests to get to the paralyzed spiders or wasp grubs. They learn to climb the tires of your car every night to eat the insects killed in the radiator! They out compete most other species of ants in their ideal habitat which happens to be exactly what a bluebird needs. These Fire Ants avoid deep dark woodland areas. They use electromagnetic fields to navigate by and are drawn to utility right of ways that create a huge magnetic field and this is to them just like a bright light to a night flying insect! They travel along wires and often plug up electric breaker panels and the control boxes for water wells and outdoor air-conditioning units. In a bird nest they may sometimes be found swarming over unhatched eggs. They cannot chew into a normal egg shell but they will immediately enter the egg as soon as the baby bird pips the eggshell creating a small hole for them. They can drive off the female bird and the eggs will chill and not hatch when she abandons the nest to them. Multi Queen Fire ant mounds can have as many a 250,000 ants per mound with more than 400 actively laying queens per mound. It is not unusual for there to be 200>400 of these mounds per acre in good habitat (gulf

Bluebird Symposium a HOT Success!

The 2005 Summer Bluebird Symposium, led by Keith Kridler, brought us 29 New Members and \$1,716 ... and this success came in our “down” time in the hottest heat of summer.

Cheryl Anderson, Chairman, and her crew (Mindy Mitchell, Michelle Rider, Kathy Pinkerton and Joan Goodkin) deserve a round of applause. And, many thanks to those who donated silent auction items.

The Symposium travels from region to region each summer in order to bring a TBS event to a venue “within driving distance” for individuals across Texas over a period of years. So far, we’ve covered the Golden Triangle, Texas Hill Country River Region, and Dallas/Fort Worth.

To volunteer to chair next year’s Summer (3rd Saturday in August) Symposium in your region, contact Pauline Tom. We’ve developed a general plan for conducting the event.

A silent auction brings fun and profit to each TBS event. We sent to each of the donors this photo of the 2005 Symposium auction winners with their items.



coast states from East Texas to Florida). That many ants need a LOT of food. That many ants can search out every square inch of ground and every tree limb within their territory. And yes fire ants can kill healthy baby bluebirds. After day thirteen they can cause the young to leave the nestbox well before they can fly although often the older birds are also killed. KK

(Note: The information provided above regarding Fire Ants was originally posted on the Bluebird-L mailing list.)

**North American Bluebird Society Convention
Hosted by Texas Bluebird Society
April 26-30, 2006
San Antonio Airport Hilton**

www.NABS2006.com



President's Column

An updated and upgraded roster provided the mailing list for this newsletter - finally! The TBS Board extended your membership by three months to convey gratitude for your patience.

In other Board action, TBS sent \$500 to Heard Museum in McKinney, TX, for their drive to buy adjoining property to save it from development. Heard Museum nestboxes host not only bluebirds, but also Prothonotary Warblers and other cavity-nesting species.

What do you think of the proposed mission statement (below)? Can we fling our heart around the statement? If you have comments, please write or phone. Soon we will embrace this statement or an adaptation.

Every year at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo (this year, October 1-2), we hear "joy of bluebirds" success stories from those who obtained a nestbox because of a contact with TBS - through our efforts in a previous year. "Our" work continues to expand across Texas, impacting conservation and human hearts.

Hosting the NABS Convention brings TBS the opportunity to make "a lot" of money; but it costs over \$10,000 to produce the event. Do you know a corporate decision-maker who would take a look at our sponsorship opportunities for NABS 2006?

Contact sponsors@NABS2006.com or phone Mindy Mitchell, 817.980.7986 to obtain a sponsorship package.

For the NABS 2006 auctions we seek donated items (nature-related or Texas-themed). Find a donation form in the centerfold of the convention brochure in your complimentary mailed Fall issue of "Bluebird."

Hope to see you at our annual TBS Convention in Boerne on Saturday, October 29, and at the NABS Convention we host, April 26-30, 2006, at the San Antonio Airport Hilton.

Yours,
Pauline

Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

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

Non Profit Standard
Paid
Permit #444
Buda TX 78610

"Build Your Own Nestbox Cam" – Instructor Needed

We have scheduled this workshop (\$200 fee for supplies) for Wednesday afternoon and Sunday afternoon during the NABS Convention. An electronics salesperson provided a list of supplies, but he must now be out-of-state the last week in April. We have a "Birds & Bloom" article with instructions and contact information for a bluebirder in Georgia who helps people build nestbox cams. Would you be interested in instructing the workshop? E-mail volunteers@NABS2006.com or phone Pauline Tom at 512.268.5678.

Richard Heilbrun (from page 1)

by the county appraisal district, can be classified under Agricultural Use and provide the landowner with a tax valuation similar to traditional agricultural practices.

Richard Heilbrun has been with TPWD for 3 ½ years and has been in San Antonio since April 2004. He holds both a Bachelor and a Master degree in Wildlife Ecology from Texas A&M University.

During Richard's 1 p.m. address at the 2005 TBS convention at Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne on Saturday, Oct. 29, attendees will benefit from a basic introduction to the tax valuation process, learn about the requirements for the program, and gain instruction in various management strategies to benefit native Texas wildlife.

WILLS POINT FESTIVAL - HELP NEEDED 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: Pauline Tom, 512.268.5678.

*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)

TEXAS Blues

Texas Blues is a bi-monthly publication

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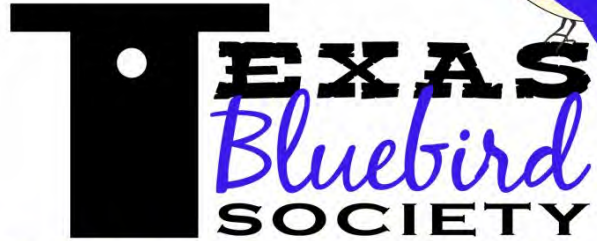
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Texas Bluebird Society



4th Annual Convention

Saturday, October 29, 2005
Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne
(just northwest of San Antonio)



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

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Bill Lindemann

"Hill Country Nature" by Bill Lindemann

"Wildlife Valuations" by Richard Heilbrun

Schedule:

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| 10:00 Bill Lindemann, Guest Speaker | 1:00 Richard Heilbrun, TP&W, Guest Speaker |
| 10:45 Break / Silent Auction | 1:50 Silent Auction Ends |
| 11:00 Season Summary & Highlights Discussion | 2:00 Farewell |
| Noon Lunch / NABS 2006 Information / Silent Auction | |

For more info: www.texasbluebirdsociety.org Email: info@texasbluebirdsociety.org Phone: 512.268.5678



Richard Heilbrun

Driving Directions from San Antonio:

Take Interstate Highway 10 north about 30 miles to the first Boerne exit, number 542, which is Highway 87 north. Follow Highway 87 north through the intersection with State Highway 46 west. Continue up the hill on Highway 87, which is also Main Street.

As you descend the hill into Boerne's Historic District (where Main Street is called the Hauptstrasse) and approach the bridge over Cibolo Creek, take the angled lane to the right that crosses the creek. Turn right onto River Road (State Highway 46 east), which parallels Cibolo Creek.

Continue on Highway 46 east for about one mile and turn right onto City Park Road. (If you reach the Kendall County Fairgrounds you have gone too far.)

Take City Park Road almost to the end and turn right into the Cibolo Nature Center. Directions are available online at www.cibolo.org. Print the MapQuest map.

Registration Form: includes box lunch from Bear Moon Bakery and snacks

Enclose membership dues (if applicable), and registration fee with form.

Mail to:
TBS
P.O. Box 40868
Austin, TX 78704

Mail before Monday, October 24th, to avoid the \$7.00 "At-the-Door" Fee

- _____ \$10.00 Member Registration
- _____ \$25.00 New Household Membership (includes free nestbox)
- _____ \$20.00 Non-member Registration
- _____ \$ 7.00 At-the-door Late Fee
- _____ \$ Total Enclosed

NAME(S) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____