

# TEXAS Blues



The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society ■ Volume 8, Issue 3

## In This Issue

Texas Tree Swallows . . . . .	1
Keith Kridler Lifetime Achievement . . . . .	2
New Members . . . . .	2
Volunteers . . . . .	3
Bluebirds Beat the Heat . . . . .	4
2009 Annual Meeting . . . . .	6
Planning Ahead . . . . .	6
Meg Scramman - New Board Member . . . . .	7
Donations . . . . .	7
Kids Korner . . . . .	8
Memoriam . . . . .	9
Mealworms are Fun? . . . . .	10
President Pauline . . . . .	12
Musings from the Master . . . . .	13
2010 Bluebird Season Kickoff . . . . .	14

## Welcome To Texas! Tree Swallows Are Expanding Their Breeding Range

Many of us have been lucky enough to witness the aerial antics and flight patterns of the beautiful Tree Swallow as they escape the cold weather up north to enjoy the milder weather in Texas. A few of us, in the Brazo Bend area, have had the pleasure of witnessing nests, eggs, and successful fledging as Tree Swallows begin to stay in some parts of Texas year round.

### Physical Description

Male Tree Swallows can be identified by their glossy, iridescent, dark blue or blue-green plumage. Their cheeks and entire underparts are white.

Adult females resemble the males but tend to be a little more greenish. It takes two years for females to attain their adult blue-green plumage; thus, females in their first breeding season (in other words, about 10 months after they fledged) are light brown on the back with darker bits of green scattered through the upperparts, especially on the head and wings.



Male Tree Swallow.  
Courtesy of Shaw Creek Bird Supply.

Juveniles are a dull gray brown. The tail and wings are slate brown with a slight greenish tint. The belly and breast are white, and often the breast has a faint gray band.

Across most of northern North America, the Tree Swallow migrates north earlier in the spring, lingers longer into the fall, and winters further north than other swallows, in part because of its ability to eat berries and seeds. A cavity nester, the Tree Swallow has benefited from campaigns to erect Bluebird boxes. This small, agile flier is social and tolerant of people.

### "TEXAS BLUES"

This newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society is published 4 times a year.

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www.TXblues.org

continued on page 5

# Keith Kridler Receives a Lifetime Membership to TBS in Appreciation for His Lifelong Dedication to Bluebirds



President Pauline Tom presents Keith Kridler with his Lifetime Membership plaque.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

*BILL & ELLIE ABBOTT • KATHRYN ARBEITER • LARRY ASHLEY • AL BARR • RENEE BARRY • MARY ANN BEAUCHEMIN • BETSY BLACK • BECKY BLACK • BOB JONES NATURE CENTER • TRISH & SCOTT BROWN • MARCY BROWN • CAROLYN BURRINGTON • STEFFANI CHAPMAN • KATHY COWARD • JULIE DeMARIA • ROY & KAN DIXON • PAULA ENGELHARDT • VALORIE ERICKSON • MARY EUBANKS • PATRICIA FERGUSON • MARY J. FERGUSON • ELISSA FLETCHER • MARY FULTON • ANNE & J.KEITH GAFFORD • GARY GRAY • PAUL GUNDERMANN • TOM HARDILEK • KIRSTI HARMS • LINDA HILL • DIANA HILLIER • SHIRLEY HROBAR • KATHLEEN HUNSDORF • ANNE & GLENN HUNTER • CHARLES & LYNN JACKSON • WAYN ELLEN JEANES • DARBY KACHMAR • MARIE KENERSON • RHONDA LEHMAN • KATHY LETZRING-BLOCKER • RAY LEWIS • JAMIE LIGHT • BERT & DIANNE LINDSEY • SUSAN LIPKA • JEANETTE MATTIZA • KIM MEIER • MATTHEW MUNDY • ANITA PIROG • RIO BRAZOS AUDUBON SOCIETY • CAROL ROCK • ALICIA SHEFFIELD • JOE SIMMONS • MARY NELLE SINITIERE • CURTIS SMITH • KAY SMITH • PAM SMOLEN • ROBERT STUCKEY • LAUREN SYLVESTER • ANGELA TURNER • BOB WARNEKE • KATHY WEATHERLY • JEANNE WILLIAMS • JUDITH WILLIAMS-LOHMAR • BECKY WILLIAMSON • JAMI YOUNG • ROY ALLEN • FRANK ALLEN • VB, ROANOKE • BR, MONTGOMERY • JB, MEADOWS PLACE • WB, SPRING • DB, THE WOODLANDS • HB, THE WOODLANDS • PC, AUBREY • JUDY CHILDS • SD, FT. WORTH • KD, HOUSTON • MD, SHREVEPORT • GD, RICHARDS • SD, ITALY • MD, CYPRESS • RD, TOMBALL • WF, FLOWER MOUND • CH, SPRING • JH, MAYPEARL • AB, PLANO • MH, ROANOKE • BH, HOUSTON • SJ, MIDLOTHIAN • BJ, MIDLOTHIAN • EDNA KENNEDY • SK, CYPRESS • BK, SOUTHLAKE • AL, FT. WORTH • ML, MAGNOLIA • DL, HOUSTON • RM, KELLER • CM, WOODVILLE • JM, SPRING • KM, SAN ANTONIO • DP, WILLS POINT • MP, MCKINNEY • HQ, NAVASOTA • DR, COLMESNEIL • KR, UTOPIA • THEO RICHARDSON • CR, SPRING • HR, TOMBALL • LS, CONROE • PS, THE WOODLANDS • BS, LOUISVILLE • GS, SPRING • SS, MONTGOMERY • MW, AUSTIN • JW, WOODVILLE • RW, BEAUMONT • CW, ROANOKE • RW, HOUSTON • DAVID & JANE WILEMON • MZ, ROANOKE*

# Special Thanks to Volunteers!

## *Volunteers Make It Happen*



*Like a good boy scout, our volunteers must be prepared for any challenge. Ron Tom serves as our "Vanna Volunteer" as he demonstrates the attributes of the TBS built nestbox at the recent Annual Membership Meeting held in Conroe on October 3rd.*

TBS is totally dependent on the dedication, enthusiasm, knowledge, and willingness of its members to volunteer for whatever is needed. Our sincerest appreciation to these volunteers serving 6+ hours this year in whatever capacity we needed! Also, a special thanks to member Martha Bowden, for finding Johnson City Signs. There will be many volunteer opportunities in 2010 as TBS continues to build nestboxes, establish bluebird trails, host a TBS booth at a variety of local events, even help with administrative chores or write an article for the newsletter. Contact us at [pauline@texasbluebirdsociety](mailto:pauline@texasbluebirdsociety) to volunteer.

DAVID ALLEN	BOB HOUCK	WEINDELL STILES
NITA ALLEN	SHARON KERSTEN	SCOTT STRICKLAND
ANDREA BROWN	MAXEY KIRKLEY	CAROLYN TREGO
WAYNE BROWN	PATTI MARSHALL	GLENN VINKLER
PAT CONLEY	LYSLE MOCKLER	GWENDA VINKLER
HARRY EVANS	DAN RAYFIELD	RICHARD VOISINET
CAROLYN GRITZMAKER	DEBBIE RAYFIELD	VANESSA VOISINET
JEAN HEFFERNAN	REX REVES	BARBARA VINSON
	MEG SCAMMAN	

## *Volunteer Extraordinaire*

### **Congratulations to Barb Ohlman, recipient of the 2009 TBS Blue Feather Award!**



*The Blue Feather Award is presented to this year's recipient, Barb Ohlman, by President Pauline Tom.*

What is the Blue Feather Award, one might ask? It is our significant achievement award presented to an individual who supports the organization's mission, events and projects in an exemplary way, making her/him a "true blue" bluebird friend.

chores; ferrying nestboxes and event supplies, setting up booths in (what seemed like) hurricane conditions, email fliers, solicit silent auction items, need I go on?

Barb encountered an unusual volunteer opportunity this year. A concerned citizen contacted TBS for help with relocating nestboxes in line of fire on disc golf course. Barb agreed to head up a team for the relocation. While "Barb's team moved the nestboxes, they chatted with the disc golfers. Soon thereafter, "Barb's recruit for NestWatching the nestboxes was approached by the President of the Disc Golfers Club with a \$100 donation. That's our girl!

Does this face look familiar? There is a good reason for that! Barb has been all over the state helping TBS with various events and projects. Often at a moment's notice, Barb rushes out to the rescue, even if she ends up driving 200+ miles to get there.

Barb has been active in one of this year's primary projects – member participation in NestWatch. She has set up nesting locations for Bear Creek Trail in Keller, and entered monitoring data for Azle Nestbox Trail. Barb will continue to be a nestbox distributor for the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

In addition to recruiting new members, Barb has taken the time to write out instructions and provide sample documents to help assist novice booth coordinators as they manage his/her first event. Of course, we have to throw in all of the "usual"

Barb's enthusiasm and dedication are appreciated. Pauline Tom, president, recently mentioned "In addition to all of this, she encourages me!" Who could ask for more? Thanks Barb!

## Bluebirds Beat The Heat

After the HOT summer we just experienced, we can certainly empathize with the need for bluebird parents to keep the family cool. A little help from us goes a long way to ensure the bluebird family has every opportunity to successfully raise multiple broods.

Several years ago, David Shields devoted a long hot summer determining if providing a heat shield to nestboxes really made a difference. David concluded "Preliminary trials show that applying the Heat-Shield to bluebird boxes greatly increases the number of fledglings on a Bluebird trail in Ola, Kaufman County, Texas. Temperatures in the Heat-Shield box was consistently lower during a day of monitoring. The maximum difference was 6.3°F lower than the traditional box designs during the sweltering Texas summer. This study demonstrates that providing Heat-Shields to nestboxes decreases nestling casualties by decreasing inside nestbox temperatures. Future study is needed to observe long range use of Heat-Shields on this Texas trail to ultimately determine whether these amendments increase the total number of fledglings over time or have an effect on the number of hatched eggs."

David shares his original design and process. Full description and illustrations are available at [www.texasbluebirdsociety.org](http://www.texasbluebirdsociety.org) under the Resources tab on the menu.

- Heat Shields may be installed on any nestbox.
- 1/8" plywood or plastic shields, or similar material, are installed on all 4 sides and top. Each shield is installed with at least 4 spacers (1/2 to 3/4" long x 1/4" diameter plastic tubing mounted with 1 & 5/8" wood or sheetrock-like screws) to provide air flow between the shield and Nestbox.
- All shields can be full-size except the shield on the top or side that opens for inspection & cleaning. That shield may be reduced in size as necessary to allow for opening and design of box.

**David's latest update:** I don't recommend plywood at all. It just doesn't last. I am having terrific results with the HDPE material that I buy from K-Mac Plastics. I buy my spacers and screws from Home Depot. I buy the small diameter (smallest they sell) PVC tubing in plumbing and cut them in 3/8 inch lengths on my band saw and I get the deck screws that are coated over in the nail/screw section.

I order 1/8" HDPE sheets from this website. I could not find HDPE at either Home Depot or Lowes. Any good durable plastic will work...even Lexan but that stuff is expensive. I order from K-Mac. KS-1906A HDPE-.125x24x48 HDPE-Naturals - 4 Pieces. This is the minimum order...4,



*How many holes do you see? Faux holes on the side of the nestbox help attract a bluebird to the nestbox.*

24x48" sheets for \$79.17. It easily cuts on a table saw. I usually rip each sheet into 6" sheets and cut to fit my TBS-1 style nestbox like the attached photo with my miter saw. I do get the PVC spacers at Home depot in the plumbing section and the coated deck screws in the fastener section near the nails. This combination lasts for years...unlike my other materials that I used in the beginning of my research back in 2002.

Nestbox design and location are critical to managing heat. The TX Bluebird Society nestbox has excellent ventilation and a large roof overhang, and is a good design for hot climates.

In hot climates, install nestboxes in the shade of trees protecting them from the afternoon sun.

Ventilation is necessary. Slots at the top of the nestbox are more efficient at removing air in a nestbox than round holes. If possible, position nestboxes so breezes will blow through the box from side to side to carry away summer heat.



# Tree Swallows

continued from page 1

## Range & Distribution

Tree Swallows breed across most of North America, roughly on a line from central California to the mid-Atlantic region, and northward to Canada. The wintering range is mostly on the east coast, from New York through Florida, and around the Gulf of Mexico to Texas. Significant populations also winter in Arizona.



*Tree Swallows nested at Brazos Bend State Park, which is a special event. The juveniles fledged on Sunday, June 27th. I observed the parents flying in with dragonflies and depositing them in the young birds' mouths while on the wing. By Frank Farese, Houston, TX.*

## Population Status & Trends

Overall, this songbird is widespread and fairly common. Tree Swallows appear to be expanding their breeding range southward into the central and eastern United States, including Texas, where populations are increasing.

## Conservation Issues & Efforts

Tree Swallows thrive where dead trees, or snags, are not removed from woodlands, and where non-native competitors, like House Sparrows, are not supported by human activities. Mature wetlands and forests contain snags, which attract woodpeckers that excavate nest holes, and produce the insects that young Tree Swallows need. Nest boxes are beneficial



*Photo courtesy of our friends at [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org)*

natural cavities over water are the only spots these birds have been found nesting in the state."

"There are so few reports of Tree Swallows nesting in Texas and they only seem to nest over water at this time in our state and only on a few lakes. There may be larger numbers of Tree Swallows nesting in Texas only the people that have them don't know what they have nesting." *Keith Kridler 4/9/06*

## Fun Feathered Facts

Hi all - this is especially for beginners who may not be aware of the fun of giving feathers to tree swallows (TRES). Now is a good time to collect clean soft white feathers about 1-3 inches long. Wait until the nest is being built, go out about 20 feet from their box where they can see you, and float a feather in their direction. Both male and female will chase after it and take it to the nest.



*This pine straw nest has an unusual amount of pure white feathers, laid out almost like a peony, recurving over the eggs (not visible in the photos). Photo courtesy of our friends at [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org).*

Often one will drop the feather in air for the other to catch, and play that game for a few minutes. If feathers are in short supply in your area, TRES will take yours right from your hand after a while. It's a great way to get a close-up look at these birds. I stand on my porch roof sometimes, which makes it easier to float the feathers. Once the eggs are laid, they are no longer interested. I recall a study not quite completed that indicated that nests with lots of feathers may result in healthier babies. A good place to find feathers is anywhere sea gulls hang out. Try it if you like these birds!

**Note:** *I have had a number of replies about collecting feathers, so thought I had better add a note of warning. Please don't buy feathers at a craft store - heaven knows what chemical preservatives have been used that might cause harm to young birds lying next to them. Also please don't take groups of people near any swallow box and risk causing birds to desert the nest. Throwing of feathers is for one or two people only, preferably ones who are already familiar to the birds at that box. Courtesy of Dot from Bird-L.)*

"Tree Swallows are showing up in different areas of Texas and are found nesting over water on certain lakes from Central Texas on into East Texas. Nestboxes mounted over water or

## 2009 Annual Membership Meeting Highlights

The Annual Membership Meeting was held on October 3rd in Conroe. As promised; a little business, speakers, Board of Director Elections, nest box sales awards, door prizes and a lot of fun!

Linda Crum and Caryn Brewer, board members and master gardeners, shared their knowledge of bluebirds and which plants attract bluebirds. A complete plant list can be found on our website [www.txblues.org](http://www.txblues.org) under the menu tab "Resources."



*Juveniles love pokeweed. Planting native berry-producing plants will give bluebirds reason to hang around during the winter months.*

During the winter months, and at other times of low insect numbers, bluebirds will switch to convenient fruit for nourishment. Pokeweed, a native plant also known as pigeonberry, provides a meal for our blue feathered friends. Berry-producing shrubs like yaupon, American beautyberry and pokeweed help create an environment that will support the birds through the lean times. These sunlight-dependent shrubs normally occupy a transition zone between a clearing and a forested area. They will be most effective if placed on the edge of large, grassy areas.

### Volunteers Are Appreciated!



*Harry Evans receiving his permanent volunteer name badge for services rendered at TBS events and projects.*

The City of Azle Parks Department contacted TBS for assistance with a bluebird trail at their new city park. Harry volunteered to consult, install, and monitor the

*continued on page 8*

## Planning Ahead for 2010 Summer Symposium

Plans are well underway for next year's 2010 Summer Symposium. Andrea Brown, Symposium Coordinator, is already hard at work preparing for another terrific event.

First step is date and location.

Save this date, **August 14, 2010.**

The site has also been selected; the new civic center in Henderson. The City of Henderson is in the process of building a beautiful new civic center targeted to open this spring.

Second step—everything else! Speakers, food, awards, prizes, silent auction, publicity, VOLUNTEERS to help. Whew, so much to do and only nine months left!

Featured speaker for the event is Keith Kridler. Plan on a jammed packed, fun filled day (as always). If you can help in any way – worker bee, solicit auction items, publicity, setting up room, ferrying nestboxes and other paraphernalia, administrative tasks, or offer new ideas – let Andrea know with an email to: [andie3564@gmail.com](mailto:andie3564@gmail.com).

Many more 2010 Summer Symposium details will be forthcoming. Keep an eye on our web site [www.texasbluesociety.org](http://www.texasbluesociety.org) or in the *Texas Blues*. Hope to see you there!

### Did You Know . . .

Want to race? Bluebirds can fly up to 45 miles an hour if necessary.

Eastern Bluebirds can spot caterpillars that are camouflaged and immobile from about 50 yards away, even in rough pastures and tall grass.

## Welcome Meg. Our New Board Member

—Meg Scramman, self-proclaimed “good helper and worker bee,” was elected to the Board of Directors at the Annual Membership Meeting.



Meg Scramman joins Board of Directors

Hello everyone. I’m new to the Texas Bluebird Society Board and would like to share my bluebird experience. I have enjoyed watching birds all my life in the various places we have lived. It was not until I moved to Texas that I

saw my first bluebird. I fell in love with these beautiful birds. And as luck would have it, I was introduced to the Texas Bluebird Society 1 ½ years ago by Linda Crum, a fellow board member and master gardener. She showed me the bluebird nest boxes at the Montgomery County Extension. The rest is history.

I could not wait for Linda’s scheduled talk to the Master Gardeners to obtain a nest box; I had to have one ASAP! So, I went out and purchased a nestbox at Wild Birds Unlimited (WBU), complete with pole and baffle, and erected it in my backyard. The bluebirds took to it within a month. I was so excited! Not long after, I joined the Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) and acquired a TBS nest box with my membership.

I erected that box at the other end of my yard, in hopes of having two bluebird families. I had not yet learned about

bluebird territory size. Throughout the rest of the summer, I enjoyed watching the bluebird parents raise two broods. I was unable to monitor the WBU box because of its peaked roof and short sides which made it difficult to peek inside to count eggs and bluebird young. Nonetheless, I was a proud bluebird parent.

For this bluebird nesting season, I swapped the bluebird nest boxes in hopes that the parent bluebirds preferred location over nest box type. I really wanted to monitor this summer, a much easier task with the TBS nest boxes.

But momma and papa bluebird preferred the WBU nest box and raised four broods without my ever knowing how many fledged from each brood. I am happy to say I am now hooked on bluebirds and look forward to serving on the board to spread this love of bluebirds and help ensure we provide them with nest boxes as their natural nesting sites are diminished through deforestation.



First nesting in Meg’s backyard.

The newest member appointed to the TBS Board of Directors is Judy Hetherington. Meet Judy in the next newsletter.

### THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO GAVE A DONATION SINCE THE LAST NEWSLETTER.

Per Board decision, all undesignated donations in 2009 will go towards the purchase of lumber for TBS nestboxes.

JOHN & DAN BOOTH  
STEFFANI CHAPMAN  
DR. STEPHEN COHLE  
WES & TERESA CRAWFORD  
KATHY DENISON  
GEORGE & CHERYL DOWDY  
BOBBIE FIELDS  
CATHY GERO  
NORMAN GRIFFIN

DR. BRADFORD & CAROL HEPLER  
CAROL HYDE  
SUSAN LIPKA  
CHARLENE & JAMES MATUNE  
ADAM S MCCLOSKEY  
NANCY PODIO  
EVA K SCHULZE

ED & KAY SONES  
ROBERT TEANDER  
RON & PAULINE TOM  
RICKY WALKER  
DR. THOMAS M. WHEELER  
BIRD WATCHER’S DIGEST  
THE DISC GOLF LEAGUE OF WEATHERFORD

Special thanks to artists Cynthia Reid and Darby Kachmar for the donation of their beautiful paintings; and to Nature’s Way for their donation of mealworm certificates, always a popular item! Other Mini-Auction item donors include Linda Crum, Ginny Griffith, John Park, and Pauline Tom.



# Annual Meeting

continued from page 6

nestboxes. Members helping with the Summer Symposium quickly earned their name badges. See *Volunteers Make It Happen* for a complete list of members who have volunteered 6+ hours

## Everybody Wanted a Nestbox



Official TBS nestboxes were a hot item at the meeting.

Members staked their claim early with blue SOLD signs before our treasurer even had a chance to set up shop. Special sale price for members only and no tax

– even the men enjoyed this shopping spree! Don't miss the next big sale event at the Nestbox Season Kick-Off Meeting on January 30<sup>th</sup> in Bryan.



Linda Crum presents the Bluebird Habitat doorprize to Jack Dugan.

# The Kids Korner

Share your love of bluebirds with the younger generation! It is never too early to start. After a stroll around your bluebird habitat keep the enthusiasm going. Creating a bluebird mobile together is fun for all, and dare I say it; it is educational too.

The complete set of templates and instructions needed to build the Bluebird Mobile can be found on the home page of the the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) website.

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org>

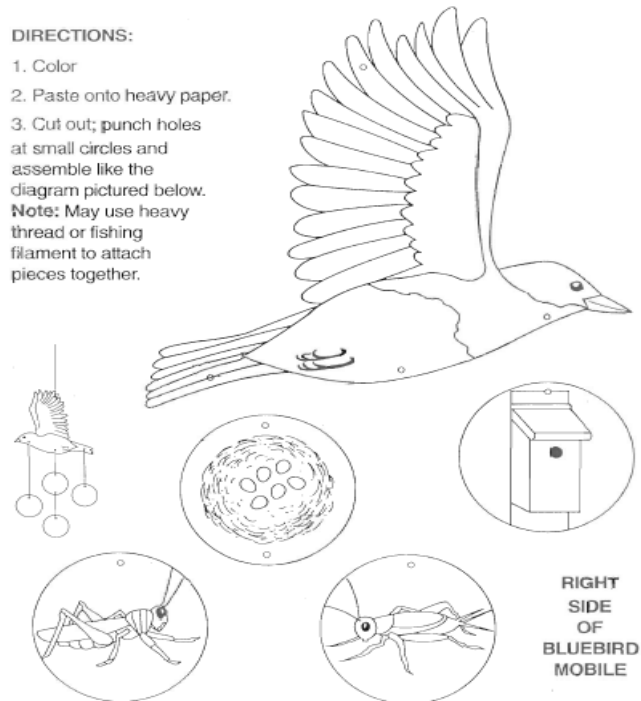
Bluebird Educational Tools

Education Packet

## BLUEBIRD MOBILE

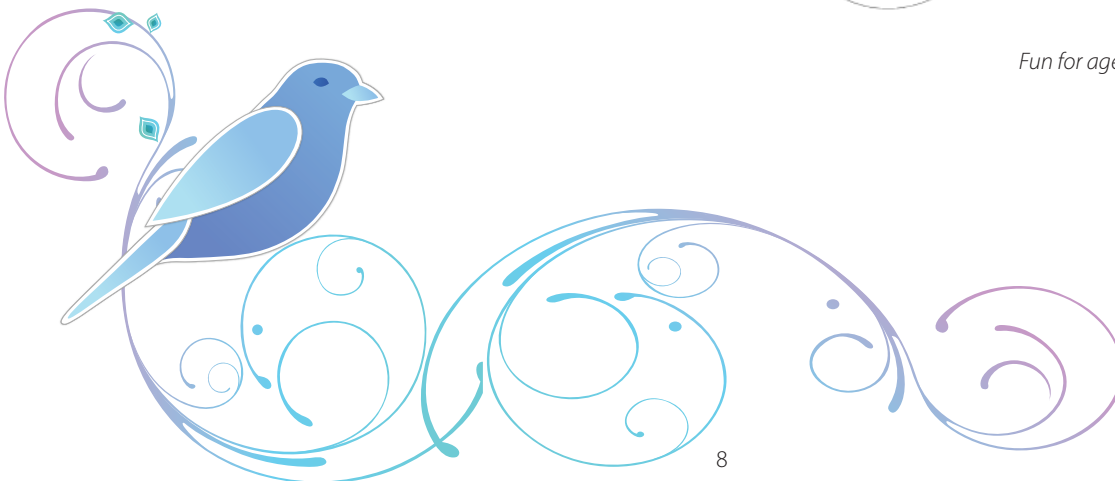
### DIRECTIONS:

1. Color
2. Paste onto heavy paper.
3. Cut out; punch holes at small circles and assemble like the diagram pictured below. **Note:** May use heavy thread or fishing filament to attach pieces together.



NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY, INC. 24

Fun for ages 1-5





# In Memoriam

## James Garriot

An avid birder, was especially proud of the numerous bluebird nestboxes and trails he established in his own backyard, of 40+ acres, and neighboring locations in and around Bexar County. James was very enthusiastic about the number of bluebirds occupying his nestboxes. Once he added the appropriate predator baffles, the number grew to almost 100% occupancy; providing a safe haven for hundreds of thriving fledglings.



James' enthusiastic conservation efforts certainly made a significant contribution to our mission of *Bluebirds Across Texas... one nestbox at a time*. TBS is privileged to be listed as a donation recipient in his honor. Donations will be allocated to the nestbox building fund. TBS will be presenting A True Blue Friend plaque to the Garriot family in tribute to James.

## Dr. William (Bill) Petty

Always involved and doing something for the Texas Bluebird Society. As a charter member (#42), Bill, and his wife Athena, provided loyal support to our fledgling society. Bill stated, "I don't want to be a member and not be involved. What can we do?" The epitome of the perfect volunteer, Bill practiced what he preached.



Bill became an avid TBS ambassador, traveling to many events around Texas. Hosting a booth or participating in presentations and meetings, he brought many creative ideas to his volunteer activities. Bill included everyone in his love of bluebirds. TBS will be presenting A True Blue Friend plaque to the Petty family in tribute to Bill.

## Big Country Audubon Installs TBS Plaque Honoring Laura Packer

In 1995 Ben Black built four Bluebird Boxes to be put up at Oakwood Trails. Among those who attached boxes to poles, dug holes for the poles and set them were Lorie Black, Laura Packer, Charlene and Tom Wheeler. Through the years, all of these have continued to have a keen interest in the Bluebirds of Oakwood Trails. Laura also tended the 42 Bluebird boxes at Dyess Air Force Base.

The Texas Bluebird Society Board of Directors sent this True Blue Friend Plaque to Randy Packer in Memory of Laura Packer. It was installed on Bluebird Box #3 at Oakwood Trails, Saturday, September 26, 2009 by Dan Symonds, Charlene Wheeler, and Kathy Hampton.



It was so fitting that on this gorgeous morning we saw at this site numerous White-wing Dove, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Barn Swallows, a Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and FOUR Eastern Bluebirds. Thanks Bluebirds for your "Flyover for Laura!"

Complete story can be viewed at [www.bigcountryaudubon.org](http://www.bigcountryaudubon.org)



# Mealworms Are Fun? You Bet!

By Susan Tartaglio

**W**hy feed mealworms? It will keep your birds coming back to your yard, and you'll love watching those feed mealworms to their babies.

In the worst weather, you can feed extra mealworms and perhaps increase bluebird survival rates over the winter. In the spring, you'll help nestlings survive.



*Dad always brings the best mealworms!*  
Photo by John Park.

Mealworms are bluebird candy! So get to know *Tenebrio molitor*. The good news? The ick factor is not as bad as you think. Mealworms aren't mealworms at all, they're the larval stage of the darkling beetle. They're not wet or squishy, and though there's gooey stuff inside, if you avoid squishing them or stepping on them you won't ever have to deal with it. Of course it's that yucky stuff that the bluebirds love, but all you have to handle is the dry, firm outer shell. And they're clean, don't carry human diseases, and won't smell if you store them properly.

The bad news? For bugs, these guys are really persnickety. They hate the hot sun, they'll die if they freeze, they'll drown if they get too wet, and they're picky about what they eat. It's a wonder they've survived long enough for us to buy them and feed them to our bluebirds. And just about everything likes to eat them, including ants, frogs, toads, small mammals, and people in Thailand, where they fry them up like potato straws. In fact, if there's a universal food on this planet, it's probably mealworms.

These problems, however, will only really concern you if you want to raise mealworms. Buying and storing them is easy - unless you have family members who don't want to open the refrigerator door for a late-night snack and see a container labeled LIVE WORMS.

Where to buy mealworms? Your local pet store may carry them but they'll charge a lot more than buying them online; still, if you want to start small, check them out. The

mealworms should be refrigerated in wheat bran, they should look and smell fresh and be a light tan color without any dark areas.

For a better price, however, use mail-order. There are half a dozen major vendors. Some are internet-only, others have toll-free numbers. The best way to start is to buy mealworms already stored in closed and vented plastic cups. These will ship, for example, in a cardboard box with four cups inside. Each cup will have 500 mealworms in their bedding/feeding medium, usually wheat bran. All you have to do is remove the cups from the box and put them in the refrigerator (not the freezer).

I like the large size mealworms, but if your vendor is out of these, buy medium. The giant and super worms have been fed growth hormones, and are too big for bluebirds to deal with.

Most vendors ship UPS. Be sure you know what day the mealworms will arrive so you can open and refrigerate them promptly.

Stored in the refrigerator, the mealworms will last several weeks. The cold temperature slows down their growth, but they will still be alive and feeding. You may occasionally find a pupa. It looks like a big, white comma. The bluebirds will eat it too, so serve it up before it turns into a beetle. Bluebirds won't eat the beetles, at least my (spoiled) birds

won't. They also refuse any dead mealworms. If the mealworms are turning black, they're goners.



*Look at me, I can get my own mealworms now.* Photo by Jennifer Flemming.

To keep the mealworms fresh, take them out of

the refrigerator and exercise them once a week. No, I'm not kidding! Dump all the mealworms and wheat bran into a plastic dishpan and add a couple of carrots washed and sliced in quarters lengthwise. Put the pan somewhere at room temperature or warmer (80 degrees is great) for eight hours or overnight. The mealworms will become active and start eating the carrots. When you're ready, remove the carrots (scrape off any mealworms clinging to them), scoop

*continued on page 11*

## Mealworms

*continued from page 10*

up the mealworm/bran mix in the cups and put everything back in the refrigerator.

When you're ready to buy bulk, you can save you a lot of money. The mealworms will arrive in the same cardboard box, but inside will be a linen bag, tightly closed (thank goodness) and full of mealworms and crumpled-up newspaper. Open the bag and dump mealworms, newspaper and all into a big plastic container with an inch or so of wheat bran.



*Everybody helps when the kids are hungry. Photo by Jennifer Flemming.*

Have this ready before the mealworms arrive. You can find wheat bran (not wheat germ) at the supermarket in the cereals aisle, or at a health food store. Feed stores also carry wheat bran, but this may contain pesticide residue which can kill your mealworms.

Shake the mealworms out the newspaper. Be careful or mealworms will fly everywhere! Some mealworms will cling to the inside of the linen bag, so turn it inside out and brush them off into the bran. Now add a few carrots, quartered lengthwise, and let the mealworms feed for several hours before you store them in the refrigerator in plastic cups. If you haven't saved enough plastic cups, you can use any sort of plastic tub that's covered. The downside will come when you're looking for butter and open a tub of mealworms instead. These cups won't be ventilated, so open them every couple of days.

Ready to feed the bluebirds? Extract twenty or so mealworms by pouring directly from the cup through a large plastic slotted spoon, so that the wheat bran falls through and the mealworms stay in the spoon. You can also pick them out by hand, of course. Now take them out to the bluebirds. When a cup is empty of mealworms, wash it and save it - you can use it again when you start ordering bulk. You can also reuse the wheat bran once or twice. How many mealworms to feed? I put out about twenty in the morning and again at dusk, more in stormy or icy weather and more in the breeding season. One 500-count cup of mealworms will last 2-3 weeks if you feed 20-40 mealworms a day.

You can't just dump mealworms on the ground; they'll crawl away. I use a sturdy white porcelain cup and dump the mealworm ration inside (remember, they can't climb up anything with smooth sides). When I was getting started, I placed this cup near the birdbaths in the late afternoon just before the bluebirds came for their daily bath. They found the mealworms instantly. Over ten days or so, I moved the cup around to the place I wanted. I now keep the cup on glass platter sitting on a plant stand near a window. I can pour water into the platter to form a moat to keep ants out of the mealworms if I need to. The bluebirds are trained to come to the cup and will find it anywhere in the yard, and I can put out multiple cups if I want.



*Dad still provides a free meal to his fledgling. Photo by John Park.*

If other birds start to monopolize the mealworms, such as a mockingbird or cardinal, you can buy a wooden hopper that hangs from a tree or pole and has plastic sides and wooden



*Parents check for predators before entering the nestbox. Photo by Jennifer Flemming.*

ends with exclusion holes. Move the white cup with mealworms into the hopper and the bluebirds will find it. My Eastern phoebe loves the mealworms too. She takes them on the wing, which is her natural way of feeding. I have even seen her swipe

a mealworm from a bluebird's beak when it was crammed full of mealworms to take to his nestlings.

I like to whistle for my bluebirds when I take mealworms out, that way they don't assume that every time I come outside I have mealworms for them. Sometimes they fly in from every direction, a real joy to see!

By now you'll be having so much fun with mealworms that you'll want to raise your own, right? That's for the next issue.

*If you are interested in ordering mealworms on-line, we encourage you to support Nature's Way (<http://www.thenaturesway.co/m>). Nature's Way has been a generous donor of mealworm certificates for our Silent Auction fundraising events. Always a popular item!*



## President Pauline Reflects

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

Charter board members braincrafted our blue slogan in October 2001, sitting under green oak trees in my back yard (while Ricky Wilson warmed her rich red chili, brought to us from Bandera because she wanted to help in some way.) After a few hours of sculpting TBS, we spit out words and thoughts and phrases. And, when the slogan emerged, we knew this new team had created together what no one of us could have done alone.

That was the easy part. Soon after, we faced a black and white dilemma: “nest box” or “nestbox” (not recognized by spellcheckers.) Quite an e-conversation ensued, with some of us for “spell it correctly.” When almost settled, Kate Oschwald Arnold countered, “Our mission revolves around this word – 2<sup>nd</sup> only to “**bluebird.**” It’s a receptacle for a nest, just as mailbox is to mail.” She lifted our eyes to see that we could legitimately use “nestbox” (seldom used back then); and, in so doing, we’ll have a part in one day bringing a cavity-nesting species specific word to Merriam Webster.

No one wild-imagined back then the impact of TBS in the spread of Eastern Bluebirds in Texas, and the impact these bluebirds would make on the lives of Texans blessed by their beauty and the aura that radiates “happiness.” The difference shows not so much in Breeding Bird Surveys, but in the backyards of many-a-member who never saw a bluebird before they joined TBS. Our “One Nestbox” booths at festivals and speaking engagements introduced most of you to “Bluebirds are cavity-nesters; provide a cavity to attract them.” (and, “Provide food by withholding insecticides and planting natives with berries.”) And, if you joined at a booth, we gave you “one nestbox”, thanks to the dues of a member who came in before you.

Many of you have special bluebird stories to tell. Renee Shaddock, who signed on last April in Hemphill, frequently relays gratitude to TBS through my mom. Her first season has her hooked. Such reward for new TBS members—and, for the TBS volunteers!

Include in our success thousands of titmouse, chickadee, Ash-throated Flycatcher, nuthatch, wren, and other **native** cavity-nesting species that hatched in a TBS nestbox . What

a difference we’ve made— a difference that will literally make an impact on scientific studies as more and more in TBS visit [www.registeryournestbox.org](http://www.registeryournestbox.org) and report observations from weekly nestbox visits to NestWatch.

Picture a 37-degree upward climbing line. That’s our graph from 2001 to the present ... with just a slight lag the two years we focused energy on hosting the 2006 North American Bluebird Society Convention in San Antonio. We hit Membership #2,000 at Summer Symposium 2009! Over 600 of those memberships (mostly Mr. & Mrs.) are current! Incredible growth during a time many non-profits suffer. (Too, our bank balance is extremely healthy.)

Please appreciate and commend your board members. After NABS 2006, we began 2-hour Board Meetings by teleconference, 9-10 times a year (adding live web this past year, with Board Members viewing my computer monitor), in addition to a steady e-communication. Thus, we’ve stayed connected and energized and focused on *Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time.*

*Hope, Joy & Peace,  
Pauline*

## A Photo Moment



These photos were taken one evening as I watched and waited for the nestlings to leave the box. I had been watching the nestlings poking their heads out of the box for approximately an hour.

Finally this one came out of the box, clung to the side briefly then went back in! I have never seen this happen before. I guess it decided it wasn’t quite ready for the world after all!! I watched for awhile longer and it eventually



flew out to a nearby tree. It is so amazing to witness the first flight out of the box. *Submitted by Jennifer Fleming*

## Musings from the Master...



Keith Kridler, everyone's resident expert, our favorite speaker, and cofounder of TBS, participates in several List-Serve groups focusing on bluebirds and their behavior. Keith has given us permission to publish his contributions to these groups. Following is an edited excerpt from Bird-L.

### Fall Is A Great Time To Install Nestboxes

**B**luebird families cover a far wider territory in the late summer as these families follow the insects and search for the fields that are cut short for hay or where livestock is keeping the grasses and weeds eaten down to a shorter level, making it easier for the bluebirds to drop down and capture their insect prey.

These really short grass/thin weedy fields in the fall will be the same type of fields that will have fewer rodents left in them; thus there will also be fewer predators in these areas come spring. These are great places to install nestboxes for use next spring. Also, watch for farms or fields that are burned over in the late summer, early fall which also removes the cover needed by rodents and small land dwelling prey.

Harry Krueger was banding adult and nestling bluebirds in Northeast Texas. These are bluebirds that do not migrate from their general breeding grounds during the winter months but stay in the same general local areas. He found that more often the female bluebirds banded from the previous year would show up in his nestboxes as breeding females than the young male bluebirds he banded the previous year as nestlings.

Female bluebirds tended to try to nest fairly close to the nestbox they fledged from. Harry had one female that returned to the same box she fledged from for 6 years! Many of his female bluebirds were re-trapped for 3 or 4 years using nestboxes fairly close to the boxes they were banded in as Nestlings. This really means that these nestboxes with multiple layers of predator guards were safer for these females allowing them to live longer and not get eaten while incubating or brooding their young throughout multiple nesting seasons. Remember, bluebirds that lose a nesting due to predation will often abandon that territory, moving to a new and safer location for the next nesting attempt.

One May Harry had a female bluebird and her mate from the previous year reuse the same nestbox they had fledged young from four different nestings. Along each side of the road in the very next closest five nestboxes he found daughters from this pair that he had banded during the summer before. It would appear, here in East Texas, dominant male bluebirds will attempt to drive off their sons from the previous year, forcing them to disperse, or, maybe the males disperse more on their own.

If a dominant male bluebird dies in late summer or early fall this will change the dynamics of the typical bluebird family, where a breeding male and female and their young often stay together during our relatively mild winters, and then disperse in early January. Sometimes they stay as a group into early Feb. In this area of Texas, breeding pairs of bluebirds tended to stay together if they survived the rigors and dangers of winter.





# Statewide Bluebird Season KICKOFF (with Silent Auction and Nestbox Specials\*)

**Saturday, January 30, 2010**  
 Bryan TX Brazos Center  
 3232 Briarcrest Drive, 77802  
 Plan your trip with the Bryan College Station Convention & Visitors Bureau [www.visitaggleland.com](http://www.visitaggleland.com)

**9:50 AM – 2:50 PM**  
**Doors open at 9:15 for Registration and Silent Auction**

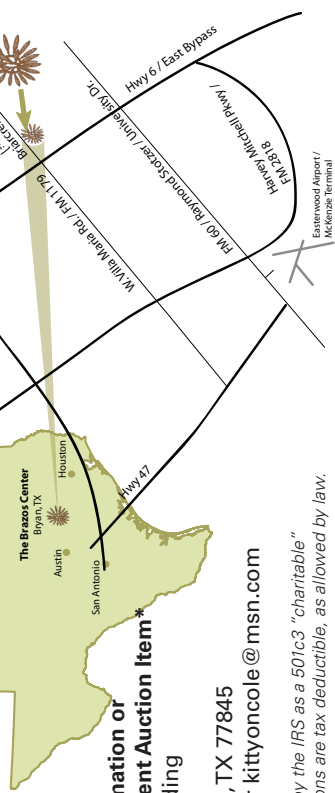
- Dr. Keith Arnold** — Status of Eastern Bluebird
- Brett Blankner** — Electronic Mapping Systems as tool for Bluebird Trails
- Dr. D.A. Patton** — Photographing Bluebirds
- Other Topics include:** Bluebird Basics, Tales of 1st Year Bluebirders, Recordkeeping with Cornell's "Nestwatch," House Sparrow Control

**Early Bird Registration Bonus:** Register by December 31, 2009, and receive 10 chances for door prizes.  
**Pre-registration** required for boxed lunch and 1 chance for a door prize. \$7.50 total. Must be postmarked by January 23, 2010.  
 At door registration (no Lunch and no Door Prizes) \$4.00.

### Nestbox Specials:

**FREE Nestbox to members who pledge to "NestWatch" at least two nestboxes** (submit observations to Cornell about once-a-week during nesting season.)

**Season Kickoff Nestbox Sale: \$12.00** ("NO sales tax" day!).  
 Limit 10.



**For More Information or To Donate a Silent Auction Item\***  
 Jim & Kitty Anding  
 5060 Cole Lane  
 College Station, TX 77845  
 979.776.8381 or [kittyoncole@msn.com](mailto:kittyoncole@msn.com)

\*TBS is recognized by the IRS as a 501c3 "charitable" organization. Donations are tax deductible, as allowed by law.

## PRE-Registration (includes box lunch)

### Registrant #1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
 Box Lunch:  Ham  Turkey  Veggie

### Registrant #2 (provide information on separate page only if different from above)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Box Lunch:  Ham  Turkey  Veggie

Membership Type	Number of Registrants	Cost per Person	Total Cost
Current Member		\$7.50	
New Member*		\$7.50	
Non-Member		\$7.50	
		<b>Total Due:</b>	

**Registration Deadlines**  
 Early Bird **December 31, 2009**  
 Pre-Registration **January 23, 2010**

\* To register as a New Member, please bring \$15 membership fee to the event. The fee will be collected at the door and during this event, only, includes a FREE nestox!

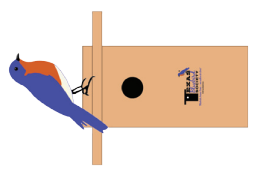
**For Planning Purposes Only**  
*(this is not a firm commitment. Please do NOT send money for this.)*

- How many nestboxes do you plan to purchase (\$12 ea)? \_\_\_\_\_
- TBS Members: TBS will provide to you FREE a nestbox at this event if you pledge to "NestWatch" at least 2 nestboxes (submit observations to Cornell through [www.registeryournestbox.org](http://www.registeryournestbox.org)).

Do you plan to participate?  Yes  No  N/A

**Mail Registration Form with Payment (\$7.50 per registrant) made payable to "Texas Bluebird Society" to:**

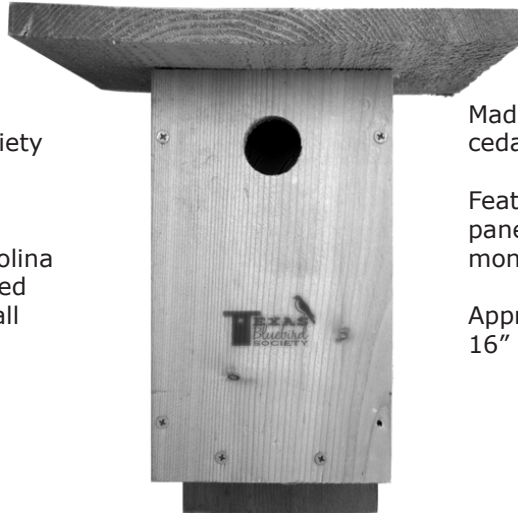
Jim & Kitty Anding  
 5060 Cole Lane  
 College Station, TX 77845





# Purchase the Official Texas Bluebird Society Nestbox!

Help our native cavity-nesting birds by installing an Official Texas Bluebird Society (TBS) nestbox on your property. This nestbox is designed to meet the demands of the Texas environment and will last for many years!



Approved by the North American Bluebird Society (NABS)

Proven to appeal to Eastern Bluebirds, Carolina Chickadees, Black-crested Titmice, and other small cavity nesters

Made out of durable cedar wood

Features a pivoting side panel for nestbox monitoring & cleaning

Approximate size: 16" H x 11" W x 9" D

## **Option #1**

***Purchase from your local distributor***

\$15 ea + sales tax

### **Email**

[tbs@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:tbs@texasbluebirdsociety.org)

to arrange pickup/delivery with nearest distributor

## **Option #2**

***Purchase in multiples of 4 Shipped via carrier***

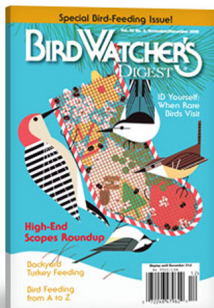
\$15 ea + sales tax  
Plus \$28.30 S/H

### **Email**

[tbs.texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:tbs.texasbluebirdsociety.org)

to place your order

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## NEW EVENT!

### Statewide Bluebird Season KICKOFF

Saturday, January 30, 2010

Bryan TX Brazos Center

3232 Briarcrest Drive, 77802

Nestbox Specials and Silent Auction



Texas Bluebird Society  
PO Box 40868  
Austin TX 78704

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit #444  
Buda TX 78610

See page 14 for registration form and full details or visit our website:  
[txblues.org](http://txblues.org)

RETURN SERVICE  
REQUESTED



Jennifer Fleming, along with husband Johnnie, brave the cold and rain during the Red Bud Festival in Buna.



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#### "TEXAS BLUES"

This newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society is published 4 times a year.

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