

TEXAS Blues



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Bluebird Sanctuary Restored At Westwood Shores

Five years ago when non-bluebirder Lonnie and his wife Letitia Castleman were searching for their retirement home, they had two priorities; a beautiful golf course community, and must be within a reasonable driving distance of their grandkids. Westwood Shores on Lake Livingston matched both preferences. Avid golfer Lonnie soon became a regular on the course. As the days passed Lonnie started noticing bluebird activity around the golf course. He also noticed that spread throughout the golf course were old nestboxes in various stages of disrepair—missing roofs, rotted wood, leaning sideways and even a few on the ground. Curious, Lonnie began asking the locals how the nestboxes came to be on the golf course. It turns out that years before, TBS member Dick DeYoung started the 25 nestbox bluebird trail with help from the Westwood Garden Club. They contracted a local sign company to create the Bluebird Sanctuary. Even the bluebirds enjoyed their new perch on top of the sign. Unfortunately, Dick moved, eventually the Garden Club became defunct, and the bluebird trail was left in place but not maintained or monitored.



On the ground. Curious, Lonnie began asking the locals how the nestboxes came to be on the golf course. It turns out that years before, TBS member Dick DeYoung started the 25 nestbox bluebird trail with help from the Westwood Garden Club. They contracted a local sign company to create the Bluebird Sanctuary. Even the bluebirds enjoyed their new perch on top of the sign. Unfortunately, Dick moved, eventually the Garden Club became defunct, and the bluebird trail was left in place but not maintained or monitored.

In March 2016 Lonnie and Letitia looking for something to do, decided to attend the Season Kickoff in Bastrop. Though they consider themselves casual birders, just watching their backyard feeders, like many of us, they quickly became enthralled with bluebirds. Lonnie credits the informative sessions, friendly folks, and especially his conversations with Ron Tom. He and Letitia joined that day. "Shoot," proclaim Lonnie, "I couldn't even spell bluebirds back then." Today, Lonnie travels across the state giving presentations to clubs, and well, just about everyone he meets soon knows that bluebirds are one of his primary interests. Lonnie is also serving his second year as VP and Nestbox Certification Coordinator, as well as a Nestbox Distributer. His first major conservation effort was to restore the bluebird trail. With the help of a few volunteers, Lonnie built and installed 50 nestboxes. Five are located on the quarter mile entrance to Westwood Shores, two at the HOA offices, and 43 throughout the golf course. Local artist, Frank Matthews, painted the design and other volunteers did the lettering and mounted the new sanctuary sign. Thanks to other residents interested in bluebirds, there are now about 100 nestboxes scattered in yards and along the streets.

Smart avid golfer Lonnie installed his nestboxes at the perfect height so he can monitor the nestboxes using a mirror while still sitting on his cart. Lonnie also loves to use the NestWatch phone app to quickly record activity. "The vent opening between the roof and sides of the nestbox is 5/8", I can slide my phone in the vent and take a photo of the inside activity. Cool!"

Letitia knows that when "Bird Man," as Lonnie is now called, goes to monitor nestboxes, she will have a few hours for herself. Between answering questions, and initiating conversations, nestbox monitoring turns into a fun/social activity. Lonnie and Letitia love to involve their grandkids in the 'high tech' monitoring activities as they teach them all about bluebirds.



Red-cockaded Woodpeckers Have Babies This Year!



Last year's July issue of TX Blues featured a story by Certified Wildlife Biologist, Donna Works, on the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers living in Jones Forest in Conroe. Donna is responsible for managing this endangered species by monitoring their habitat and nesting activities, and banding any offspring. Unfortunately, last year the group of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers did not have any successful breeding attempts. However, this year Donna is happy to report there have been 3 pairs of woodpeckers that have successfully hatched five babies!

"We are especially pleased with this year's hatching success on the forest. Though not every single egg laid hatched, we had one or two nestlings hatch from each clutch, and all looked very healthy. This is much better than the last two years, where eggs were laid but nothing hatched." Donna Works

It's lucky Donna is not afraid of heights. Most of the natural cavities made by the woodpeckers themselves are at 30 or 40+ feet high; some are higher, some lower. If the nest cavity is one of the artificial cavities that we call "inserts," those are put at 22-32 feet, depending on the installer and the condition of the midstory (brush and small trees) in the area.

Donna was also happy to report "Today (6/1) I banded two nestlings from a nest on the I. D. Fairchild in Cherokee County, our other State Forest with red-cockaded woodpeckers.



Although Donna is solely responsible for the actual banding procedure, she allows volunteers to observe the process and assist in other ways, like helping to secure the ladder! The color bands are used to identify each individual bird. The silver USGS band that I put on the left leg has a unique number. The colored auxiliary bands that I put on the right leg are placed in a unique combination for each bird. I try to use the same single color band above the numbered silver band for a year or more, just to show it is one I banded on either of our state forests with RCW. In the field, there is no way you could read the number on the silver band. However, with right lighting conditions and good binoculars or spotting scope (or even zoom lens on a camera), you can see the color combinations and check the biologists' records to see when and where the bird was hatched and banded. Banding activity at Jones Forest occurred May 31st. Photos by Stuart Mills.

Help Bluebirds Survive Late Summer Nesting

David's First Experiment Using Heat Shields In 2002

Sweltering summer heat in Texas can literally cook bird eggs or nestlings during the spring and summer months. Historical records on a bluebird trail in Ola, Kaufman County, Texas show that as much as 10% of eggs never hatch and many nestlings die of the summer heat in single wall nestboxes. A study was conducted on this trail in an attempt to minimize egg and nestling casualties during the nesting season from late February through August 2002. Preliminary tests show that providing an extra layer of material (Heat-Shield) on a bluebird nestbox will maintain cooler temperatures inside the box. The following report will summarize the results of this study and show an increase in the number of birds that fledged with Heat-Shield boxes in 2002 versus the number of birds that perished from this trail in previous years without heat shields. Ultimately, not one nestling perished from heat exhaustion in 2002 with the Heat-Shield boxes. See the full report online [TX Blues Volume 2 Issue 1](#) Feb/March 2003. TBS member **David Shiel's** innovative approach is a proven heat deterrent and aids in successful late summer nesting for bluebirds, or anyone else using the nestbox!



HeatShields 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. The spacing between the shield and the nestbox is critical to the success of the Heat Shield.

Complete [plans](#) for a TBS Texas style nestbox is also available online.

Neil Yeager's Experiments In South Carolina Confirm Texas Style Nestbox Is #1

TBS is thrilled to report the Texas nestbox received high marks in recent testing. In fact, based on the studies by Neil Yeager, a bird enthusiast and South Carolina resident, the TBS Board has unanimously approved to increase the vent size to 5/8" on all future nestboxes.

The increased vent size allows the nestbox to remain cooler yet still allows for the capture of House Sparrows. Of even greater importance, Mr. Yeager's research shows the importance of either painting weathered nestboxes a light color or using heat shields as this results in a significant decrease in the internal temperature of older, weathered boxes, by as much as 9 degrees. See full report online [TX Blues Volume 10 Issue 4](#) 2011.



NestWatch App Update Now Available

Your smart phone makes reporting a quick monitoring activity!

A new NestWatch app update is here! Update your app today from the [Apple App Store](#) or the [Google Play Store](#). This new update features improved maps and location tagging, including the ability to work with cached maps in offline mode. New tap-to-answer workflow makes data entry faster, eliminating keyboard frustrations. Note that you can [turn on automatic updates](#) to allow updates to install as they are available, rather than manually updating each time. And as always, we welcome your [feedback](#) for improvements for next time.

Meet Certified Nestbuilder Jerald Mowery & The Bird Babes



(L) Jerald Mowery



(Ctr) Mary Lou Mowery



(R) Lauren Hutten, Tommie Smith, Mary Lou Mowery

Jerald Mowery, (above) is one of the four original nestbox builders certified by Don Lawrence in 2014. Jerald's interest in woodworking began in the seventh grade. He is happy to report that all these many years later, he has "a very nice shop." After 45 years in the furniture business (retail, wholesale, and manufacturing), Jerald is always interested in opportunities requiring his woodworking skills and use of his workshop.

Jerald's wife Mary Lou, saw the article in TX Blues announcing the nestbox certification program and TBS' immediate need for builders. "Since retiring we volunteer a lot and this seemed like a worthwhile thing to do" explained Jerald. A call to Keith Kridler resulted in a call to Don Lawrence which resulted in Jerald's certification, which has now resulted in Jerald and his crew building 875 nestboxes to date.

Like fellow builder Don Mitchell, Jerald shares the nestbox building fun with his wife Mary Lou, and four lady friends, Linda Pilhower, Tommie Smith, Lauren Herman, and Sandee Casey. Jerald is happy to say "these beautiful ladies, known as Jerald's Bird Babes, are all very good friends, we do a lot of things together including Shakespeare Club, and all types of volunteer work." Friends definitely make it more fun, but there is no denying that it really does take a lot of measuring, cutting and tightening screws to make 250 nestboxes at a time. Jerald appreciates the help of his building crew. Sandee was the one who had the blue t-shirts made for the first building session and Jerald sprang for the matching aprons! Jerald sadly reported that after three years of building nestboxes together, their friend Sandee Casey has passed away.

Jerald and Mary Lou are adamant about taking care of wildlife, especially birds. They have 6 bird feeders, 6 suet feeders, 8 hummingbird feeders, 3 wood duck nestboxes, 6 bluebird nestboxes and 2 deer feeders.

Building bluebird nestboxes was a perfect match for their lifestyle!

Mary Lou owned the Kickapoo Valley Ranch in Red River County for 40 years. It was there she developed her deep love for all wildlife. Her old ranch sign is proudly displayed in the woodworking shop. (see photo above right)

Jerald and Mary Lou had both lost their spouses when they met ten years ago. They married two years later. Now they have 2 daughters, 8 grandkids and 4 great grandkids to keep them very busy when they are not building nestboxes!

It is the work of wonderful volunteers like Jerald and his Bird Babes that allow TBS to continue helping bluebirds across Texas.



Mary Lou Mowery, Sandee Casey, Tommie Smith

...We Love Our Babies!



(Left) 2nd brood – **Meg Elizabeth** does a great job monitoring her bluebird families. Checking each day to ensure there is nothing unusual going on inside the next box. She's a great bluebird Mom!

Meg also posted a great video (4/29) of bluebird babies still in the nest.

Check it out on Facebook!



Attached is a picture of a homely but cute newly hatched (8May18) BB at Tierra Verde Golf Course in Arlington TX. **Donna Piercy** is coordinating the monitoring and maintenance of 12 nest boxes on this Audubon certified golf course. **Dick Schoech**

More Great Photos Like These From Our Members On Facebook!




Sarah Anderson provides a tasty treat!



What we are willing to do just to photo-graph those babies!

I did my homework in front of my bathroom window all day today waiting for our blues to fledge! I dragged a chair and

brought my laptop! 

It's been fun watching the blues the last few weeks from my new panel window! **Debra Ann**



One of our nest boxes has four Bluebird eggs. Fresh water, meal worms, and patience paid off. The **Anderson Family** in McKinney

Summer Across Texas...

Everybody Loves Our Nestboxes!

Upper left: Ash-throated Flycatcher
Upper right: Bewick's Wren nest
Lower left: Titmouse eggs and babies
Lower right: Carolina Chickadee nest



Photo by Grace Scalzo



Nature photographer Grace Scalzo discovered a Brown-headed Cowbird egg in her Bewick's Wren nest. She has a Texas Bluebird Society nestbox with 1 9/16-inch entrance hole. In Texas, cowbirds can and do enter "bluebird" nestboxes. **See pg 8** for more information on cowbird eggs in nest.



(Above & right) Our first nestbox with titmouse photos. As you can see, we didn't get bluebirds, but black crested titmouse. However, it really added to the joys of being outdoors! So glad for a community of like minded folk! Valeska Danielak 5/28

Extended roof for shade, large vents under roof for a nice breeze, nice and deep to help protect babies, and corner floor vents to help with drainage - what's not to love!



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Nestbox Inventory

Contact Us:

tbs@txblues.org,
PO Box 40868
Austin, TX 78704
512-268-5678 (Pauline Tom)

Moved?

Send email/address changes
to records@txblues.org

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Letitia Castleman
Lonnie Castleman
Dee Meyers
Don Ramsey
Jerald Mowery
Tom Ohm
Shannon Ramsey
David Smith
Pauline Tom
Ron Tom
Vanessa Voisenett

Volunteer at a local event, a great way to spread the word about our true blue friends! Volunteers are always needed and can choose from a wide variety of ways to help TBS. Call Pauline Tom at 512-268-5678



Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

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Welcome New Members!

- Leah L Adams
- Debbie Caraway
- Kevin Corwin
- Lee Ann DeVincentis
- Clemente Guzman
- Claudia Enriqueta Martinez
- Linda Morales
- Misty Newton
- Celia Orozco
- Bobbie Russell
- Leo Tucker
- Teresa Turko
- Laura Walthers

The majority of our new members join at local festivals. Most of our new members joining in May attended the Lake Mitchell Migratory Bird Day festival held annually in San Antonio. A special thanks to member David Smith for again hosting the TBS booth at this exciting event! We couldn't do it without our great volunteers.

Brood Parasites: Brown-Headed Cowbirds



Brown-headed Cowbird egg in a Veery nest.

Brown-headed Cowbirds are brood parasites, that is, they do not build nests, incubate eggs, and care for young. Instead, the female deposits as many as 40 eggs per year in nests that belong to other bird species. More than 100 other species have provided host nests for cowbird eggs. The female cowbird finds these nests by watching patiently from an observation post. She typically chooses a nest with eggs smaller than her own and lays a single egg quickly at dawn once the host has also started laying eggs. Brown-headed Cowbird young do not evict their nest-mates, although the female cowbird may remove and sometimes eat eggs from the host nest. However, cowbird nestlings typically out-compete their smaller nest-mates for food.



A female Brown-headed Cowbird.

reprinted from Nest Monitoring Manual (pg18)

OK To Remove Cowbird Eggs In TX!



Grace Scalzo removed cowbird egg from her Bewicks Wren nest. See page 4.

A former TPWD employee gave word to Texas Bluebird Society years ago that Texans could remove cowbird eggs and nestlings from bluebird nestboxes. Nest-Watch gave instructions that cowbird eggs and nestlings could not be removed. So, Texas Bluebird Society requested clarification and NestWatch adjusted their language.

Jason Martin, NestWatch Coordinator, secured new language for the NestWatch section about cowbird control (2nd paragraph under "[A Compound Problem](#)"). BTW - Michigan also shares the same opinion.

It is difficult for female cowbirds to gain entrance into a bluebird nestbox with a 1.5" opening. **But, it does happen!**



Photo by Jennifer Fleming

Federal law protects all native nesting birds!

- Do not disturb birds or collect nests/eggs.
- Monitor and report activity to NestWatch.

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Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor
Send stories/photos to editor@txblues.org



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