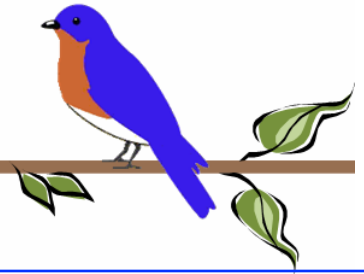


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter • March 2020 • Volume 19. Issue 1

President Pauline's State Of The Organization

2020 will be a year of change. The three most senior Board Members (myself, Linda Crum, and Benji Konvicka) will retire at year end. The Board has planned a "2020 New Vision" retreat in early June, primarily to make transition plans.

How are we doing with our mission, *To spread Bluebirds (and other native cavity-nesting birds) Across Texas...one nestbox at a time* – through education; and, the installation of "NestWatch'd" nestboxes in appropriate habitat; and, sustaining and increasing their natural food supply (insects and berries of native plants) – while enjoying the process and the bluebirds?

2019 year-end: **Membership #6698** Over 1,000 current members.

Nestboxes Built: 17,000 (approximately) **Nestboxes Distributed: 16,000** (approximately)

We are spreading Bluebirds (and other native cavity-nesting birds) Across Texas!

2019 Income: \$50,105 2019 Expenses: \$48,592

Our 2018 IRS 990 posted in About Us /Accountability section of our website gives fine details of the level of our accountability and financial details.

Our webmaster, web editor, and bookkeeper (Susan Crowson is retiring in March) hold our only paid positions. They give to TBS much more than what we pay. Still, when we added these paid positions during past decade, our expenses for compensation went from \$0.00 to \$13,000 budgeted in 2020.

The cost of cedar continued to skyrocket in 2019. We continued to give away nestboxes to new members face-to-face and sell nestboxes at a wholesale price; and, we gave away dozens of nestboxes to members who pledged to NestWatch at least two nestboxes at the NestWatch sign-up station at the 2019 Symposium.

Texas Bluebird Society spends 0.00% on fundraising. 100% from our FUNdraiser (and every donated dollar during the entire year, over and above annual dues) purchases cedar for volunteer-built nestboxes.

Volunteers do TBS' work. **Every member who installs a nestbox and/or plants natives is a volunteer**, as we work together to spread "Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time". Many of us have "NestWatch'd" nestboxes. If you report nesting observations to NestWatch, you make a difference for science, beyond Texas' borders.

Most members of the all-volunteer Board of Directors cover at least one major responsibility. Each attends a monthly 2-hour Board Meeting via GoTo-Meeting. With amazing devotion, several past Board Members continue with their "board member" primary responsibility.

The newsletter editor is a volunteer, as are the writers.

Five Certified Nestbox Builders construct our "official" nestboxes to precise specifications.

Festival Booth Hosts, assisted by others, give TBS a presence at several festivals each year. **Will you volunteer to host or help staff a booth?**

Over two dozen Nestbox Distributors sell memberships and nestboxes. See a map of network on our website.

Through our website, FaceBook (Thanks, Vanessa!), "Bluebirds in Texas" booklet, and presentations every aspect of our mission statement gets covered.

You can help TBS simply by planting natives and "enjoying the process and the bluebirds".

Thanks! Love to you, **Pauline Tom** (President)

Another Opportunity In 2020

Article/photos by **Thomas Irwin**

After a very strange bluebird season in 2019 on my ranch in Mills County, I am looking forward to this upcoming season. The New Year brings another opportunity for bluebird nesting. I have 15 nestboxes deployed on my 195 acre ranch. The ranch is about 16 miles northeast of a town named Goldthwaite, TX.

I became a member of the Texas Bluebird Society in 2015. I have enjoyed being a member and learning about how to attract and have bluebirds nest on my place. I have seen several different species that nest on the ranch, namely Tufted Titmouse, Bewick's Wren and Eastern Bluebirds.

The weather seems to be just the opposite than 2018. 2019 started off wet and ended in drought. This created an odd nesting season. I had families successfully fledge and then abandon the nestbox. In years past the same family would stay laying eggs until August. Also, I had bluebirds next in boxes they had never nested in before and then abandon the nextbox after they fledged. In the past, the bluebirds tended to nest in the same nestboxes year after year.

My focus in 2020 will be to concentrate my nestboxes in the areas where I have had the best luck with nesting bluebirds. I will keep them a little more than 100 feet apart. I have a lot of open areas on the west side of my ranch and this is where I plan to deploy my nestboxes. I make sure my nestboxes are in good condition and are clean until the bluebirds begin nesting. I will continue in keeping the grass trimmed around the nest boxes. I have noticed that keeping the grass trimmed encourages more bluebirds to nest. The nestboxes where I have had success will not be relocated. I will then fill in areas that are available. The nestboxes were relocated to the 2020 locations in early January.

I am also adjusting the nestboxes again this season. I am moving the nestboxes closer to landing sites. I feel this may also encourage bluebird nesting.

I look forward to this season with great excitement and hope to give a positive report of successful bluebird nesting later this year.



Success! Four bluebird eggs.



Mom sitting on nest two days after final egg was laid.



4 babies about 7-10 days old. I missed the fledging, but, they were still hanging out with the parents when I got a glimpse about a month later.

In The May Issue:

- Dr. James Kroll Shares His Prothonotary Warbler Research
- Donna Honkomp Reports On Bluebird Trail Activity In Dallas/Ft. Worth Area
- Are Your Bluebirds Safe From Predators?

Would you like to contribute an article/photos? Contact editor@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Hackberry, Sugarberry, *Celtis laevigata*

By **Linda Crum**

Master Gardener / Master Naturalist

Want a native, deciduous tree that is fast growing, drought tolerant and an important food source for birds? One that will grow in almost any type of soil as long as it is well drained? That is the hackberry, also known as sugarberry, *Celtis laevigata*. It grows up to 80 feet in height with a trunk up to 3 feet in diameter. The flowers are greenish and inconspicuous, appearing in spring (February-April) just before the leaves. The drupes, or fruit, have a thick skin and the surface has a netlike texture, ranging in color from orange to reddish-brown.

Hackberry's range is south from southeastern Virginia to southern Florida, west to central Texas and northeastern Mexico, and north to western Oklahoma, southern Kansas, Missouri, southern Illinois, southern Indiana, and western Kentucky.

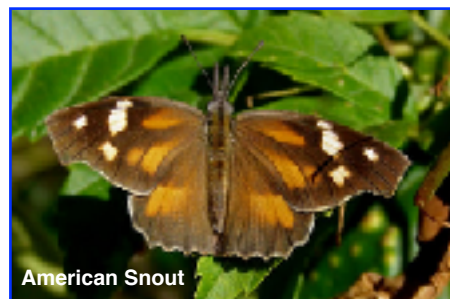
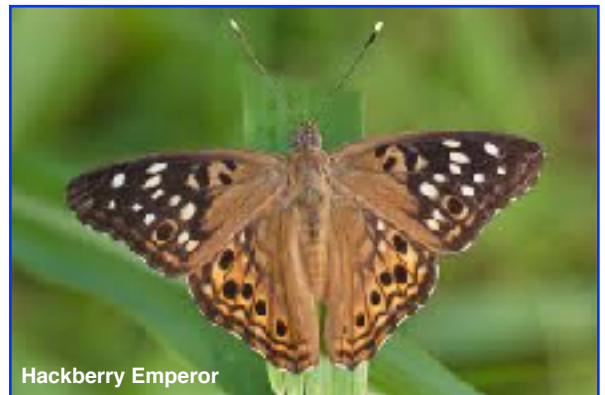
An important species for wildlife, many species of songbirds including bluebirds eat the fruit. At least 10 species of birds, including mockingbirds and robins eat the fruit and use the tree for nesting. It is also a larval and nectar host for two butterflies, hackberry emperor and American snout. White-tailed deer browse the leaves and fruit.

Hackberry was used by Native American tribes. The Houma used a concentrate made from the bark to treat sore throats and venereal disease. The Comanche would make a pulp from the fruits that was mixed with animal fat, rolled into balls and roasted in the fire for food. The Navajo boiled the leaves and branches to make a dye for wool.

The wood of the hackberry is used for furniture, athletic goods and plywood.

Hackberry is propagated by seed and cuttings. Stratify the seeds by storing wet seeds in sealed containers in the refrigerator for 60-90 days. Sow in spring. Or direct sow in fall and they will self-stratify in the soil over winter. Root cuttings from juvenile wood and from root sprouts or suckers.

Adding native plants, shrubs, and trees, that bear fruit in the winter and attract insects year around, in your yard, is a great way to attract bluebirds to your backyard. Keep the grass mowed please - easier for the birds to spot their dinner!



Anyone Can Be A Bird Watcher

Article/photos by **Celena Flores**



I was at a birding tour at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center in San Antonio, TX when I came across what looked like a table full of bird houses for sale. It turned out it was the Texas Bluebird Society's table and I was in luck. For twenty bucks, I could get a nestbox and a membership. So, my extroverted self said, "heck yes!" I'm always excited for a new endeavor and proceeded to learn everything about eastern bluebirds.

Eastern Bluebirds are symbolic of joy and happiness in the future. They are not

very big birds at all and I'm told they love mealworms. Eastern bluebirds are not common in my area at all. In fact, I heard they are more common in east Texas. I live about 10 miles outside of Floresville, TX. Technically, I am in San Antonio, but it's outside the city near a lake called Calaveras. I assumed now that I have my nestbox in hand, all I had to do was follow the instructions on how to put it up, have a water source, a food source, and magic! The eastern bluebird would be on my shoulder every morning during my bird-watching hour. Not so, not so. Birds of Texas did come, yes, but the infamous bluebird never showed. What I did see was the



beautiful Northern Cardinal, the loud Blue Jay, many types of finches, and the ever-persistent sparrow. I wish I could say I saw one eastern bluebird, but not one came into

my sights. I made sure I was ready with my brand spanking new Cayzor 12X42 binoculars which I especially bought for my new hobby.

I thought the birds I longed for would come quickly and in numbers of force. Not surprisingly, I was a bit disappointed. And then something maybe not so magical, but still really cool, happened. I heard a

tapping as if there was a rapping, outside my yard gate door. I ran inside and grabbed the Cayzors and jumped backed outside to see a beautiful Ladder-backed Woodpecker pecking away at one of my mesquite trees. As a first-time birder, this was epic. I now realize I hear woodpeckers everywhere almost every time I bird watch, but the first time really was something special. It made me realize that I wasn't just waiting for the eastern bluebird. I was waiting to discover another world that I rarely, if ever, paid attention to. My thoughts had never found the peace that I had in those moments to hear the woodpecker's tapping's. Bird watching has helped me to get



off my phone and stop and smell the fresh air!

Thanks to the Texas Bluebird Society, I have found solace in a new hobby that can easily be for everyone no matter your background.

I have two nestboxes up, one on each corner of

the yard, about 100 yards from the front and back doors. One hasn't been touched, but the other has



been approached and partially filled with some nesting. Check out the pictures. My hopes are up for a possible spring family of bluebirds.

So, I guess waiting for my Eastern Bluebirds hasn't really been about the nestboxes or the food and water source. It's been about connecting back into myself and nature. Bird watching can be that for everyone and I highly recommend it. However, I am in a bluebird society after all, so my next special day will be when I get to see my first Eastern Bluebird.

Editor's Note: Your nest could be a bluebird nest. Keep us posted on who is using your nestbox. There are bluebirds in your area so keep watching!

Making the Rounds

Article/photos by **A. Hornbeck**

As I walk down the farm lane heading to the back of the property I worry about my boot heels getting caught in the cracks of clay earth that opened up sometime in the late summer and never quite closed back up. It was that dry this year. It would be quite appropriate for the Texas weather to switch us back to drought mode, as soon as we get out of it. The only constant thing is change and nothing on earth changes like the weather in Texas. As I



contemplate the cracks in the red clay I wonder how the birds are doing, is it dry for them too? Will they come through here this year? It'll be time soon when you can start to see the little blue flecks of color flitting through the winter bare mesquite. Stepping over another tiny chasm I head further down the lane, further into the edge of the woodland and closer to my first destination. As I reach the box I take a minute to preserve the scene. The nestbox is still in good shape. It's turned on its pole a bit northward, and the nesting chamber is piled high with the old nest of some unknown woodland bird who made a home of it for some portion of the fall. I rake the old nest out with my glove. I have in a bag some damp towels and I give it a good wiping out. Then I twist it back to a more easterly facing position, take in the scene again, imagining how it would look to me if I were a small eastern bluebird looking for a cavity to nest in, hoping the birds will like that spot this year, and then I head on to the next nestbox. The next two nestboxes look untouched other than an old wasp nest in one of them. they both get an adjustment in order to catch the sunrise better and they both get a good wiping.

With the same hopeful feelings I head on to box number four. When I get to the place the box should be it's nowhere to be found. I know I am in the right place. Then I see a corner of grayed wood poking out from underneath a tuft of yellow grass. As I look closer I realize the pole along with the rebar support have both been bent into an L shape right at ground level. It must have been something big to do that. Was it a sasquatch or a neighbors cow? I assume it was the cow but I like to think you never know what you may find living back here. At any rate I am always a bit testy when something messes with my birds. I make a mental note to get a new pole set and bring my tools back to get the box and baffle and get it set in a new spot for the upcoming nesting season. Well box four was a bust, time to see the rest. Box number five needed just a little wipe and re-positioning.

When I got to box six I approach it like I always do. I come slowly up to the box from behind so not as to startle whomever may have homed up inside. Then I give a couple taps to the box just you know because its impolite not to knock before opening the door to someone's home I suppose. I open the box and find a nest, but its a different looking kind of nest both in the materials used as well as the shape and form of the nest. It dawns on me that this could only be the nest of a mouse. I wonder how a mouse could climb a sheer pole and make it through the predator baffling but nature finds a way. Then I spot it, a tiny twig of a branch from a nearby tree is just lightly resting on the edge of the box and thats how our new tenant comes and goes. Thinking of the confluence of events that may have transpired to lead our little friend through the pasture, into the trees, and up and down infinitely winding branches eventually finding this perfectly fortified home in the sky leaves me unable to destroy its little home. I think I'll give them a couple more weeks here. I can't imagine its an easy life in these parts for a tiny mouse and I won't sleep well tonight knowing I made it that much harder for them..Yeah I'm a softy when it comes to nature. Ok two boxes to go. Box seven is the oldest and I deem it ready for replacing. I keep a couple new boxes on hand just in case a box is damaged or just gets worn out. I'll replace this one when I come back to replace the one that was bent. Well I'm nearly done, the last box is up closer to the house just on the edge of the yard and the back of the property. As I come within around 50 yards of it I see something. A streak through the air and then that



(Continued on page 6.)

Continued from page 5: **Making The Rounds**

unmistakable blue, flitting around on top of the box. I see him duck inside for a minute then come back out and fly up to a nearby tree. I just stand there and observe for awhile. The bluebird going from the tree to the box, back and forth. Then in the tree I see another movement. This one a similar blue but tinged more deeply with gray. The female. It looks as though they



are out looking for a place to raise a family. For a couple years straight I saw this box produce 6+ birds per year and I believe that this is a member of that clan returning to a familiar place where the boxes are kept clean and ready for them to carry on their family line. Will they stick around this year or are they just stopping by to say a brief hello.. Either way it makes me proud and happy to think that ac-



tions I take may help these beautiful fragile creatures continue to exist and thrive in areas steadily becoming more populated by subdivisions and shopping malls. In a world stacked against them my little farm can be a safe space for them to exist, and that over the years has really come to mean something to me. It is a true and real measurement of our ability to willfully affect habitats in

positive ways. These are lessons I am learning. It is a gift from the bluebirds to me, their way of thanking me for the nestboxes and the time spent caring for them, but in the end, I am the one who is truly grateful.

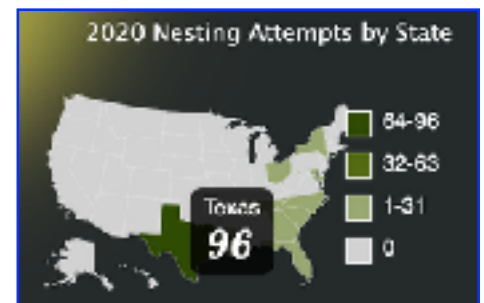
Reports Are Coming In - Bluebird Babies Are Here!



From **Roberta Marshall** - Early birds! Hatched approximately on Feb.15th in E. Ft. Worth. 5 eggs were observed on the 2nd. They survived two freezes before they hatched.

NestWatch shows 96 nesting reports from TX. Is yours one of these? Make a difference beyond your "own backyard" by participating as a citizen scientist.

Please check your Nestboxes about twice a week during nesting season and report each observation to nestwatch.org. Their app makes it super easy! NestWatch reports to the world in real time.



Monitoring nests incorrectly can put birds at risk! Review the [Code of Conduct](#) to be sure you are a good monitor!

NestWatch Data Used In New Study: How Drought Affects E. Bluebirds

Climate models are predicting drier conditions and more persistent droughts in North America, and not just in the western regions. In a recent study using data from NestWatchers, scientists were able to conduct the first range-wide analysis on the effects of drought on Eastern Bluebird breeding success.

In our latest blog post, Dr. René Carleton of Berry College explains how data from NestWatch were instrumental in the study, which is unique in how it explores the effects of drought on three different measures of breeding productivity: clutch size, hatch rate, and fledging success. [Read about the new study here.](#)

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Roberta Marshall

Event Listings
(Ft. Worth)

Contact Us:

tbs@txblues.org,
PO Box 40868
Austin, TX 78704
512-517-5678 (Pauline Tom)

OOPS!

October issue had boo-boos.

Barb Ohlman is pictured on page 8, not Lysle Mockler.

Donna Honkomp is the 2019 Bluebirder of the Year. Donna's last name was misspelled.

My apologies!

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Susan Crowson
Linda Crum
Chris Honkomp
Donna Honkomp
Bill Johnson
Susie Johnson
Don Mitchell
Archie Manning
Roberta Marshall
Sharon Miggins
Jerald Mowery
Dee Myers
Debbie Park
John Park
Shannon Ramsey
Vanessa Voisinnet



Roberta Marshall and Sharon Miggins prepare to host TBS booth at Peanut Festival in Aubrey.

Volunteers Are Always Needed! Call 512-517-5678

Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

James Douglas & Delores Coleman
Sandra Creighton
Eileen Egloff
Kathryn Fagalde
Mary Good
Lewis Houser
R. L. Langley
Judy Lano

Luke & Meredith Lorick
Flora McCormick
Katherine Peake
Karen Rueb-Hall
Marion Shaver
Brandi Smith
Linda Uchal

Welcome New Members!

- Cindy Acosta
- David Fulton
- Drew Allen
- Diane Gibson
- Cheryl Allison
- Mariann Golden
- Cathey Barrington
- Chris Hallgren
- Gail Bean
- Heather Hanna
- Cheryl Beesby
- Mark Hansen
- Katu Bell
- David Holford
- Barbara Boss
- Lewis Houser
- Betsy Browder
- Amy Jackson
- Melanie Brown
- Judith Jamison
- Ashley Brown
- Frieda Joyce
- William J. Brown M.D.
- Sharon Kucko
- Jami Brumfield
- Brandon Langehennig
- Susan Buntz
- Kathy Lee Lee
- Clifford Burke
- Linda Little
- Mary Cantrell
- Mary Jo Madden
- Betsy Carney
- Rick & Debbie Marsh
- Todd Carter
- Sherri Matthews
- Brenda Clark
- Cindy McKinley
- Ann Corley
- Marie-Eddie Morgan
- DeAnna Curtis
- Lucinda Morgan
- Susan De Los Santos
- Carolyn Morris
- Carl & Susan Epple
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- Tim Foster
- Kristine Perez
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- Valerie Perkins-Swords
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- Cathy Rogers
- Sandra Rosen
- Paul Rountree
- Christina Sanders
- Arthur Savard
- Beth Ann & Jim Shelton
- Edith Smith
- Brandi Smith
- Steven Smith
- Mike & Dawn Steele
- Brenda Strong
- Marketta Tefteller
- Pam Tincler
- Evelyn Tucker
- Norman Walker
- Denise Weaver
- Dylan White
- Paul Wick
- Elizabeth Wiley

**New members who give us permission to print their name.*

Volunteers Needed At Future Events

The majority of our members join while attending local festivals.

Check [Events](#) on our website to find a local event near you. Just contact the booth host listed for the event to volunteer to help staff the booth

Or, is there a favorite festival near you that would be an ideal event to host a TBS booth? We can provide all of the supplies and materials you will need. Contact TBS (512-517-5678) to volunteer!

April 4th

Denton Red Bud Festival 2020

Denton, TX

Contact sharon@txblues.org to volunteer

April 25th

27th Annual Wills Point Bluebird Festival

Wills, TX

Contact harold@txblues.org to volunteer

June 13th

31st Annual Blueberry Festival

Nacogdoches, TX

Contact pauline@txblues.org to volunteer

June 13th

36th Annual Tomato Fest

Jacksonville, TX

Contact harold@txblues.org to volunteer



Federal law protects all native nesting birds!

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

The Texas Bluebird Society newsletter, *TX Blues*, is published four times a year: March ■ May ■ July ■ October
Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send stories/photos to editor@texasbluebirdsociety.org

Moved?

Send email/address changes to records@txblues.org

