



TEXAS BLUES

The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society

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IN THIS NEWSLETTER ...

TBS is preparing for its annual Convention! Find out where Ding Dong is. (Come to the Convention on October 30th and learn how Ding Dong was named.)

TBS has another major calendar date ... the Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo, Oct. 2-3, in Austin.

Decisions, decisions: Should you to rush out and build (or buy) a horizontal nestbox (or not).

Keith Kridler encourages bluebirders to keep up the good work in the off-season in a variety of activities.

Our thoughts are steering toward to an event 18 months away ... the North American Bluebird Society Convention which TBS will host in Kerrville. You'll find an invite to get involved now, and, hopefully, get a kick out of the open competition for a theme.

Pauline Tom, Interim Editor



Oct. 30 TBS convention to feature speaker, workshop, much more!

The highlight of the TBS Annual Convention on Saturday, **October 30** at Parrie Haynes Ranch in Ding Dong is **June Osborne's presentation, "I'd Rather Be Birding."** The talk is based on her newly-released book by the same title. This book is a collection of her newspaper columns and magazine articles written over the past 20 years and is published by Texas A&M University Press. Copies will be available for signing.



June will lead listeners through backyards and river bottoms, far and near, savoring the colors, sounds, and playful busy-ness of hundreds of feathered friends. From birding in her own backyard to spotting her 1,000th Life Bird in the shadows of Mount Kilimanjaro to watching Texas Hill Country birds through juniper boughs along the Frio River, you'll appreciate June's retelling of every excerpt.

While giving a glimpse of one woman's spiritual growth through her experiences with birds and nature, June also conveys a wealth of information about birds, both familiar and exotic, and about the enjoyment one can have in getting to know them.

Judy Brummett, Board Member and park superintendent of Sam Bell Maxey House State Historical Park will direct a "Nature Journaling Workshop." In preparation for the workshop, she is collecting samples of nesting records, field notes, and nature journals. Please mail a copy of one page of your nesting records or field notes to Judy Brummett, P.O. Box 117, Arthur City, TX 75411.

Other speakers and activities are on the registration form.

Members in attendance will elect new board members. If you are willing to be considered as a board member, please phone Nominating Chair David Shiels at 972.962.8112 or email david@texasbluebirdsociety.org

As usual, a **silent auction** will be open throughout the day.

A **registration form** is the insert in this issue of "Blues." For additional forms or information, phone 512.268.5678



Where is Ding Dong? Ding Dong is in Bell County (really), between Killeen to the north and Florence to the south, off SH 195. **Parrie Haynes Ranch in Ding Dong is the site of the TBS 2004 Annual Convention, Saturday, Oct. 30th.**



Our 4th year at TP&W Expo!

America's largest free, family-oriented festival of the outdoors takes place in Austin the **weekend of Oct. 2-3**. The 13th annual Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo will draw tens of thousands of visitors to the property where the agency is headquartered at 4200 Smith School Road.

For the fourth time, TBS will be present! **Volunteers are needed** to "run" our booth, which again will be located in the popular *Design With Nature* Section.

Volunteer are needed to take a turn talking with people about bluebirds and otherwise helping out! Phone 512.268.5678 or email pauline@texasbluebirdsociety.org.

For more information about **EXPO**, including maps and directions, visit (<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo/>) or call 800.792.1112.

HOUSE SPARROW PROOF NESTBOXES?

by Pauline Tom

"If anyone is going to make some, I'd buy one today!" Those were the words a member wrote early in the year after she read about a "House Sparrow Proof" nestbox in *Birds & Blooms*. A few months later, Maureen Hall of the Wild Bird Center in Watauga (new member!) sent TBS an email asking about the "new" horizontal nestbox. At the Bluebird Symposium in Concan, the article also was mentioned.

Why the interest? The article told of Ray Corbitt's trail of 27 nestboxes in Salisbury, North Carolina, where "slant nestboxes" (in the Paul Carrier Style) have not been occupied by House Sparrows. The idea is to make the nestboxes less attractive to House Sparrows with an entrance hole on the slanted bottom of a horizontal nestbox.

Birds & Blooms reported that they were deluged with requests for plans for the "Carrier Slot Box," indicating that "While bluebirds gladly enter the nestbox, House Sparrows prefer a more open entrance."

Unfortunately, the nestbox is not "House Sparrow-proof." The nestbox seems to be "House Sparrow-resistant" in some areas at various times, but folks who have tried the nestbox have found that it attracts House Sparrows.

Keith Kridler, our co-founder, recalls (in a message on *Bluebird L*, an electronic forum) that while he was working on *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*, the slant nestbox was designed, and the authors were asked to test it. "I think out of the four boxes I put up in House Sparrow territory, I immediately got three pairs of House Sparrows...This was before the Van Ert sparrow trap and I had no way of trapping out the sparrows. So after two years of having House Sparrows, I removed the boxes and now use them in the woods for flying squirrels."

Maynard Sumner in Flint, Michigan, reports a similar experience. "I have used a Carrier Slant Box for four years. The first three years every time a Bluebird or a Tree Swallow used the box it was killed by a House Sparrow, and only House Sparrows used the box."

A local birding store in Connecticut made some Carrier Slant Boxes after they saw *the Birds & Blooms* article, and donated a box to Bet Zimmerman for a try-out. (Bet has a great bluebird website, www.sialis.org). She installed the box in a neighbor's yard across from a House Sparrow slum ... Tree Swallows checked it out but were never seen entering it. The sparrows entered it and tried to claim it, but she didn't allow them to nest. She left the box open till they moved on.

As a general rule, House Sparrows are not picky when selecting a nesting site. They fly up into soffit areas next to exterior walls under overhanging roofs. They nest in WalMart neon signs.

Kridler believes, "By 2002 the consensus on this box was that it did NOT deter House Sparrows at all. This is another case of old information getting out in new publications and the myth will still be with us 100 years from now."

Do horizontal nestboxes work and is it possible that the nest is less prone to predation?

Ricky Walker in Bandera has converted some telephone switch boxes into horizontal nestboxes that are 5 inches (wide) x 8 inches (deep) x 4 inches (tall). Ricky is collecting data and documenting her results with these nestboxes.

Ricky comments that, "It is a rare instance that a nest gets victimized. Perhaps this box layout has more going for it than people want to realize?"

With well over 500 individuals in the TBS organization, many methods will be used to keep the native cavity-nesters as safe as feasible. "TransTexas Nestbox Network" results will be reported to TBS. Perhaps we'll find whether or not horizontal nestboxes, such as the Carrier Slant Box, have value in protecting native birds from predators ... even though they are not "sparrow proof."



Photo by Mike Hernandez, Waco

Megan Miller saw the image and requested permission for use in our newsletter.

We appreciate photos, especially those that have no restrictions. When we can provide a high quality photo of a bluebird with a press release, many times the photo is printed in color ... drawing attention to "Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time."

Photo by Ed Johnson, Kerrville.

The next issue will feature an article about Ash-throated Flycatchers, a native cavity-nesting species that uses a "bluebird" nestbox.



from the TransTexas Nestbox Network

Sherry Warner, TP&W Wildlife Rehabilitator, Leander

“I wanted to let you know that we have had the ten bluebird boxes that I purchased* from you up, and guess what?

Since last year and up until this year all of the boxes were full!! We had about four nests hatch out last year with about three eggs each and this year we have had six nests with 2-3 eggs each that have hatched out!! We have bluebirds everywhere! They are absolutely beautiful!!

If there is anyone from the bluebird society who wants to come and see them (**our area has never had bluebirds until last year when we put up the bluebird boxes**) they are welcome! (Phone: 512.267.3857)

Since we have bluebirds now, other birds such as the painted bunting and the red-headed woodpecker have come in - how exciting!

Thanks again for the bluebird boxes - what a wonderful gift we have received from them!

** Editor's Note: TBS now sells nestboxes in quantities of 15 or more for \$15/each. Purchaser must pick up nestboxes in Austin area or arrange to have the nestboxes delivered.*

Homer D. McCain of *Midlothian* wrote about the “One Nestbox” he received FREE with his membership at the TBS booth in Ellis County. “I have had two bluebird nestings in my backyard since I put up the nesting box in April. The second nesting of young birds left the nest this week (in July). Unfortunately, I did not see any of the birds when they left the box.”

Sherry Brooking of Chandler

(in July) I have a National Geographic bluebird house that I purchased from Lowe's. The design has a clear plexiglass window on the side for viewing and the front door has a wire mesh on the inside of the door to help the birds “climb out” to fledge. About three weeks ago, I was checking the house and found a BAT!!!!!! However, the next morning he was gone and did not return until tonite!!!!!!!!!! Anyway, I do not know if he liked this house because it had the mesh wire on the door which may have enabled him to “hang” or he just liked the house period. Any other stories about bats in bluebird houses and any suggestions for the future? By the way, there are two eggs in the house---will watch and see what happens.

(in August) Bat was gone the next day—never came back—the two bluebird eggs were never attended by parents so finally after 6-7 days I cleaned out the house. I think the birds were afraid to return because of the bat. Thanks for the follow up---I have had another family fledge from a nearby house.

Needed: Artwork (bluebirds, nature, Texas, et al) and other donations for our upcoming silent auction. Ship to TBS, c/o Pauline Tom, 332 Live Oak Drive, Mountain City, TX 78610.

Now is the time ...

Now is a good time to repair those nestboxes that have problems with split wood or doors that do not open easily.

For those with yard boxes this is a great time to get them painted so that they will look good all winter and be ready for the birds next spring.

It is now time to begin making more nestboxes before we get into the busy holiday season. Nestboxes make a great gift for friends and neighbors at any time of the year!

Now is the time to get some of those bluebird videos ordered so that you can loan them out to some of your local schools. Talk to your local high school shop teacher this fall and see if they will build quality nestboxes for local bluebird projects. Give them some NABS-approved nestbox plans and information on the cavity nesters.

If you raised 10 baby bluebirds in your yard this year and they return next year to nest in your area, where would you want them to nest? Whose yard near you will they be safe in? Can you place five more nestboxes in good areas near your land and have the time to check them or do you need to get other people to put up nestboxes for your birds and let them take care of the new pairs? By giving out information on cavity nesters you help all of the birds AND you are helping other people share in the miracle of watching a calcium sphere filled with gooey stuff turn into a remarkable creation that can actually fly! Bluebirds bring Peace, Hope and Joy to SO MANY people who are blessed with these birds living near them...Surely there is someone near you who needs a little more of what these birds can share with their fellow Earth Mates!

Keith Kridler, our co-founder and first Vice-President, penned this encouragement for bluebirders to keep up the good work at the close of nesting season. It first appeared on Bluebird-L, an electronic forum co-sponsored by Cornell's Lab of Ornithology and NABS.

President's Corner

New York City!!!!

Well, not quite ... actually, Ithaca in western New York state was the site for the North American Bluebird Society 2004 Convention. Ithaca is set in the beautiful Finger Lakes Region and is nothing like New York City. And yes, there were Eastern Bluebirds nearby. Convention activities began on Wednesday, July 7, and continued through Monday, July 12. Keith and Sandy Kridler, Ron and Pauline Tom, and Doug and Karen Rohde represented Texas bluebirders among approximately 250 convention attendees. Convention speakers included John Rogers "Bluebirds and More," Pat Gowaty "Insights to Behavior of Bluebirds" and of course our own Keith Kridler "Spreading Bluebird Fever." Thursday, Friday, Sunday and Monday were highlighted by numerous field trips, which included the Cornell Lab of Ornithology ... an amazing place for all birders!

So why all the ink about the NABS convention? Because **Texas has been selected to host NABS 2006!** This is quite an honor for such a fledgling (sorry, I couldn't resist) organization. We will host bluebirders from all over North America in late April **deep in the heart of Texas ... specifically, Kerrville.** Seem like a long time off? Perhaps, but preparations are already well underway. There's a place for YOU to be part of this celebration of Texas Bluebirds. New York's program listed over 50 volunteers who devoted their time and energy to make NABS 2004 a success. New York had committees for Budget & Finance, Exhibits, Field Trips, Program, Promotion & Publicity, Registration/Information, Silent Auction and Sponsors. The Texas 2006 organization will be finalized soon. With an attraction like the Texas Hill Country in the spring we easily could have 500 attendees or more! For a successful NABS 2006, there will be opportunities for as many as 100 volunteers. Won't you be one? We need you to say **YES ... NOW!** How about an email or a note right now saying "I'll serve wherever I'm needed" or "I'll serve on the _____ committee."

As you can imagine, a convention of this renown will encounter Texas-sized challenges. We have begun "rounding up" potential speakers, field trip ideas, possible entertainment and potential sponsors. Have any connections? Had any recent experiences that would be of value? Speak up ... we're all ears!

There will be more NABS 2006 details in future newsletters.

Doug

Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

To:

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Wranglin' Theme Thinkin' for NABS 2006

Yeehaw!!! The Texas Bluebird Society is "rounding-up" ideas for the theme of the national (NABS) convention we'll host in Kerrville in April 2006. The theme should be fun, creative and attract all nature enthusiasts. Please help us "cowboy up" an original theme for our Convention. "Herd" your ideas to our (idea) "corral" at www.NABS2006.com. (If you ain't got the new-fangled computer contraptions, just jot down your ideas and "dogie" them on along to our post office box.)

To help "spur" your creativity, here is a list of themes used at recent NABS Conventions:

"Carolina Blue" (2005, Asheville) ... "In a Bluebird State of Mind" (2004, Ithaca) ... "Migration to Kearney" (2003, Kearney)
"The Blue Turns Silver" (2002, Penticton, 25th Anniversary)

Everyone who contributes an idea will be automatically entered in a drawing to receive a jar of Jardine's salsa. When we've "corralled" enough ideas, we'll "lasso" the name of one lucky participant and give you a "holler."