

# TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter May 2015 • Volume 14. Issue 2

## 2015 Summer Symposium

with Silent Auction FUNdraiser

**Saturday August 8, 2015**

**9:00 AM - 3:00 PM**

Brazos County Expo Center,  
5827 Leonard Road Bryan, TX 77807

Online Reservations: [RSVPbook.com/2015event](http://RSVPbook.com/2015event)

**Early Bird Advanced registration deadline July 8:**

\$20.00 Box Lunch and 10 Door Prize tickets.

**Standard Advanced registration deadline July 25:**

\$20.00 Box Lunch and 2 door prize tickets.

**At-the-door registration: \$8.00**

No meal or door prize tickets



### ***Hotel Lodging and RV Parks***

Best Western Premier Old Town Center at 1920 Austin's Colony Pkwy, Bryan, TX 77802

To make a reservation call (979) 731-5300. Press 3 for the front desk and ask for the Texas Bluebird Society rate (\$109 + taxes). Reserve early! Availability is **not** guaranteed.

Go to [Bryan RV Sites](#) to select a camping location near the Expo.

### ***Friday Evening Dinner and Social***

A dinner and social will be held on Friday, August 7th, at the Best Western Premiere in Bryan, our host hotel. The dinner starts at 7:00 pm, with the social beginning at 6:00 pm. Cost is \$15 for dinner and \$4.00 for frozen margaritas in advance (no BYOB by state law). Margaritas may be purchased at the door for \$5.00. Soft drinks will also be available. An enjoyable event to kick off the Symposium!

### ***Silent Auction FUNdraiser***

As part of our annual fundraiser, attendees can donate and bid on items. *Every dollar raised goes toward buying lumber to build nestboxes!*

As soon as feasible, please send donations (or notification of donations that will be hand-carried to the event) to:

**Beverly Davis**

**2411 Stableridge Drive**

**Conroe, TX 77384**

**[auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org)**

For more auction information contact **Benni Konvicka** at (254) 968-6663.

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



## Bluebirds Benefit from the Dam at Lewisville Lake

Lewisville Lake in North Central Texas was created when the dam was finished in 1954. The purpose of this 28,980 acre lake above the dam is “flood control and water conservation.” The side benefits include fishing, boating and a haven for wildlife. Below the dam there is an unique green space called LLELA (Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area). This wildlife area is completely surrounded by urban and suburban areas. Its active management began in the early 1990’s when the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers found a consortium of educational institutions and the City of Lewisville to manage this almost 2,000 acre preserve.

Of course, it is the bluebird trail that runs along the road that skirts the base of the dam that is of interest to me. Its location makes it convenient for monitoring by seven volunteers checking a total of 78 boxes, 50 of which are the regular nest box design. The power lines that also run along the road make for bluebird lookouts as they scan the land and skies for insects and possible attacks from predators as well as nest boxes in which to raise their young. Some of the bluebird trail is a short trek off the road and some in times of high water can only be reached using a kayak. There is on-going research comparing box location, style, baffle or not, amount of shade and other factors with nesting activity to try to predict what factors lead to a “successful” box. A few of the older boxes that seem least likely to succeed have actually seen good production. In 2014, 27 of the 50 boxes had nesting activity and 23 of those 27 were bluebirds. Approximately 83 bluebirds fledged. The babies are banded at 10 to 11 days after hatching. So far, only one dead female has been found near the box from which she fledged.



Peterson Box

LLELA is opened to the public Friday, Saturday and Sunday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. (November 1 to March 1) and 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (March 2 to October 31). Admission is \$5 per person. Children 5 or under are free. There are opportunities for hiking, camping, birding, kayaking on the Elm Fork or Beaver Pond, picnicking in the Cicada Pavilion, visiting an 1870’s log cabin and special activities such as a guided bird and trail tours.

Seeds of native plants are collected from the Pollinator Garden/Pocket Prairie. All plants are labeled. It is like going to a library to see how plants native to this area are doing at different times of the year.

Several educational institutions (the University of North Texas, the Lewisville Independent School District, the University of Texas at Arlington, Texas A&M Agrilife, University of Texas at Austin and Rice University) use this area for research and student participation. “LLELA contains a variety of habitats, including prairies, bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands and cross timbers forest.” In this diverse habitat there are bobcats, white tailed deer, and mink as well as “wild turkeys, painted buntings and dozens of waterfowl species.” Volunteers remove exotic plants that have invaded the forests and many non-native species that have taken advantage of the former prairies. The area is actively being returned to the original state of two centuries ago when it was visited by Native American tribes and homesteaders to the Lewisville area. This is an exciting opportunity to maintain native Texas plants and animals and create a living museum to the past.

Bluebirds have been a part of my life for the last twenty years. The decision to leave North Carolina and move to Texas three years ago was difficult. However, the sight of a Bluebird Trail at LLELA helped to make the transition easier. I hope to become active in this very special niche of North Texas.

Author and Photographer: **Helen S. Munro**, Texas Bluebird Society, Past President and Editor of North Carolina Bluebird Society, Past Secretary of the North American Bluebird Society. Quotes are from the LLELA brochure promoting Preservation, Restoration, Education and Research.



## Love Those American Kestrels

Author and photographer: **Luke Hoag**  
Senior, Concordia University Texas  
Major, B.S. Environmental Science

Since I was in grade school, I have been fascinated not just by bluebirds but in another interesting cavity nester called the American Kestrel.

In my house in Cypress, Texas I was very successful with bluebird nestboxes. My first bluebird in my first box was named "Mr. B." He was absolutely the best bluebird ever.



### Facts:

- *Falco sparverius*
- sometimes called sparrow hawk
- smallest falcon in North America
- about the size of a robin

*It's one of the most colorful of all raptors: the male's slate-blue head and wings contrast elegantly with his rusty-red back and tail; the female has the same warm reddish on her wings, back, and tail. Hunting for insects and other small prey in open territory, kestrels perch on wires or poles, or hover facing into the wind, flapping and adjusting their long tails to stay in place. Kestrels are declining in parts of their range; you can help them by putting up nest boxes*

I also was privileged to watch the daily antics of an American Kestrel I named "Mr. K." He perched every day on the top of a utility pole just outside my window and across the street. The pole ran along a wide drainage ditch that offered lots of great food! I could see him dive for mice, grasshoppers, and small lizards. I never saw him eat another bird, but I did see him enjoy a field mouse on more than one occasion. He especially loved feasting just after the big mowers when through along the sides of the drainage ditch because the bugs were disturbed as a result. Dessert! Anyone?

Kestrels like to nest in tree or rock cavities but will use nest boxes and open holes found in buildings. I observed Mr. K often around the tall chimney of my neighbor's house. The chimney was made of wood siding with a vent pipe that had a cover over it. I believe, although I was not allowed to climb on the roof to confirm, that this is where Mr. K was roosting.

According to an article on "American Kestrels" at *Beauty of Birds.com*, there is good success with humans providing nesting boxes on utility poles along highways and across open field areas

Dead trees (snags) make for great excavating by cavity nesters (Scott). There is pressure to take dead or dying trees instead of healthy ones, and many do not understand the impact on birds. By removing dead trees, they also may remove bird species from the vicinity that help control tree insect populations. Also, I noticed in Cypress and also in Austin, Round Rock, and other places in the United States, that developers clear cut practically every tree without thought to true impact on the environment. Where I was born, in Thousand Oaks, California, it was a huge fine to cut down trees. You had to have all kinds of special permission to do so. Clear cutting literally destroys an entire habitat, sometimes a whole ecosystem, just for human convenience.

***I am a senior at Concordia University Texas, and I am working on a B.S. in Environmental Science. I hope to find an internship this summer that involves working to improve the environment for people and for birds!***

The Southern California Bluebird Club has started a cavity conservation initiative. Their information is at *cavityconservation.com* if you are interested.

Interesting articles for those who want more information:

Scott, Virgil E., et. al. "Cavity-Nesting Birds of North American Forests." *Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No. 511*, Nov. 1977. Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

"American Kestrels." *Beauty of Birds.com, Avianweb LLC*, 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

## My Dog Rosie Lives in a Tree!

*My late rat terrier Rosie and I had a special relationship. We were two peas in a pod. She faithfully nursed me through five bone and spine surgeries. We needed each other.*

Each day I leave my terrier team at my parents when I go to work and pick them up when I arrive home. According to my mom, Rosie could tell time and was ready and anxiously waiting just before I arrived each day. She'd then sprint down the long driveway when she saw me, hop in the front of the truck with me, and ride up the long driveway to pick up the other dogs. She was very determined to go everywhere with me and never let me out of her site. If I was around she'd lie patiently beside me waiting to go. Even if she was asleep, she'd open an eye the second I moved to make sure I wasn't leaving her. When I had to leave her behind she was genuinely sad, her feelings made even worse by her naturally sad eyes. She lived for soothing tummy rubs and licking me all over the face. When she was happy, she'd do her best to wiggle what was left of her too closely docked tail. As a matter of fact if I wasn't calling her *Sweet Pea* it was *Wiggle Tail*. When she really wanted something from me she'd prop her chin on the side of my leg and look up with big, wet, needy eyes. She especially loved her ever-present squeaky toys. I always got her a new one each Christmas (generally squirrels, raccoons, or other varmint look-a-likes) as she loved to hunt. Her trademark happy routine was to fetch said toy, hold it on my foot, and *squeak, squeak, squeak*. It didn't take me long to equate rubber duck squeaky noises with bliss and happiness.

When Rosie died in 2012 I buried her under a weeping baldcypress tree out in front of my house and planted jonquils on her grave so I would think about her each spring when they were fragrant and I was happy. When folks ask about the odd shaped tree I tell them it was a regular baldcypress until I buried Rosie there and we both began to weep. As a matter of fact it took me over a year to even be able to think about her without tears in my eyes.

Most of you know I live in the Pineywoods of East Texas and dearly love bluebirds, woodpeckers, butterflies, woods, and all of nature. I'm no bird expert, but with the help of my friends Cliff and Julie Shackelford I try my best to learn at least one new species one each year. After Rosie died, a bit of an avian miracle happened. She helped me learn what thanks to her has become my favorite bird. I try to wander through my woods at least once a week if not once a day. One day, on a woodland trek trying to cope with the loss of my beloved Rosie, I heard a sound that made me think I had gone crazy. It sounded *exactly* like my Rosie squeaking her toy on my foot. I searched for days for this mystery sound emanating from the tops of the pine trees directly behind my house. It was as if my Rosie dog was up there calling me. Finally with the help of my binoculars I realize it was a small bird, no larger than an egg, making all these squeaky noises. The volume of the squeaking was larger than the bird! How on earth could that particular sound come of that little bird? It really didn't matter. I was in love and had to know what it was. It appeared I had the chance to keep my happy Rosie on my property with me forever.

It only took the Shackelfords mere seconds to identify the unique call as that of a brown-headed nuthatch for me. This tiny little bird averages 4.5 inches from tip to tail and weighs in at a scant .4 ounces. It's a combination of blue gray, buff, and brown allowing it to perfectly blend it with pine bark where they spend much of their time foraging. They are far from flashy, but certainly win a prize when it comes to cuteness .

Brown-headed nuthatches are one of the classic birds of the southeastern pine forest, which unfortunately means they only live in the far eastern portion of Texas. They exclusively exist in open stands of mature pine trees where they forage for insects among the pine needles and bark. They also eat pine seeds (particularly during winter) and even line their pine needle nests with the wings of pine seeds. Without big pines trees there would be no brown-headed nuthatches. Herein lies a problem. ...continued on page 5.



...continued from page 4 **My Dog Rosie Lives In A Tree!**

Pines in East Texas and the rest of the Southeast are grown as a short rotation pulp and timber crop where fire is excluded. Unfortunately dense stands of young healthy pine forests don't support brown-headed nuthatches. They need forests full of large pines with few hardwoods and an open understory. In the past, nature took care of this with periodic natural upland fires that killed the excess

young pine seedlings, the underbrush, and the hardwoods, while promoting native grasses and perennials.



When fire was excluded and mature trees were cut, brown-headed nuthatch numbers declined along with other pine savanna species like the now endangered red cockaded woodpecker. Brown-headed nuthatches (and all woodpeckers) also need old, diseased, and dying trees to excavate nesting and roosting cavities. I generally preach the fact that woodpeckers are the only primary cavity dwellers, but the diminutive nuthatches can also make their own cavities if they can't find any natural ones or those abandoned by woodpeckers.

Once your eyes adjust to focusing on these little guys, brown-headed nuthatches are a delight to watch, as well as listen to. In addition to working their way up the trunk of a tree like a woodpecker, they can also

easily move down the trunk headfirst, a trait unique among birds. They are also supposedly the only North American songbird to use a tool when foraging, as they will apparently use a small piece of bark in their bill to pry up other bark for insects. Regrettably most brown-headed nuthatch activity takes place high among the towering pines. Lucky for me however they frequent bird feeders for black oil sunflower seed (one seed at a time), suet cakes, bird baths, and my plethora of bluebird (and now brown-headed nuthatch) nest boxes. I just listen for the squeaking and sit and marvel.

My fellow bluebird lovers in the Southeast are actually trying to help the declining brown-headed nuthatches by changing extra nest boxes to one inch entrance holes instead of the customary 1.5 inch holes for bluebirds. It turns out our feisty bluebirds run the tiny nuthatches away from many potential nest boxes without a smaller hole to exclude the bluebirds. Many golf courses and parks are now putting up equal numbers of nest boxes for both bluebirds and nuthatches now that bluebird numbers have more than reversed their previous decline.



I now manage my entire 50 acres for brown-headed nuthatches and other cavity dwellers by thinning and not harvesting my pines and by conducting annual control burns during spring break. In addition to promoting my dear little nuthatches, these burns also encourage other wildlife like deer and potentially turkey and quail. And especially important in a rural setting with an old house made of pine, these regular prescribed fires prevent future catastrophic fires like the one that decimated the pines at Bastrop. An added caveat is making the forest much more traversable for woodland walks with the dogs. It's

funny how we gardeners, farmers, and foresters, thought we knew so much and naturally assumed fires, old gnarly trees, diseased trees, insect riddled trees, and dead trees were bad things and should be done away with. But as often is the case, we were completely wrong. Nature is a great teacher, even better than books and professors.



Thanks to my eyes, ears, and a former dearly beloved pet I learn more and more about the natural world all the time and hope to do so until the day I die.

Author and photographer:

**Greg Grant**

SFA Gardens-Pineywoods Native Plant Center

Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture

## Do Your Research And Go With Whatever Works

One beautiful spring day in 2014, I was sitting on the back patio enjoying the afternoon. It's a covered patio and there are stereo speakers near the ceiling of the porch. Music was playing lightly and the level of relaxation was nearly perfect, except for the bird nest being built between the top of a speaker and the ceiling. The work being done on the nest resulted in nest-building materials repeatedly falling all over the patio. Despite the evidence, I had not been able to observe the culprit, but only the result of the activity.

After having to clean things up a few times, it occurred to me that nearly a year earlier I had purchased a nest box at a local farmers market. I only purchased it in order to donate to a cause that helped birds, although I knew nothing about any kind of bird. Still, the realization that I owned a birdhouse set me on a fast course to solve the patio problem.

I went into the garage and found that nest box thinking that, if I installed it out in the yard, maybe my new patio residents would occupy the box instead of the patio speaker. The backyard is a little less than an acre in size, surrounded by a wooden fence that has metal support poles. Out of ignorance, the next steps I took were completely wrong.

At the time, I wasn't sure if anything that I was going to do would help solve the patio problem, so I wasn't going to invest much time on installation of the nest box. I took the nest box and simply tie-wrapped it to one of the metal fence poles about halfway down the fence line, facing west. It was very secure, but far from a professional installation. I went back to the patio and sat down and continued a relaxing afternoon. That's when my eyes were opened to the wonderful world of bluebirds.

Within 5 minutes of placing the nest box, I just happened to look up from my position on the patio and observed a beautiful male bluebird sitting on top of the box. His brilliant blue color caught my eye and he quickly entered the box. I could not believe it! I postponed anything else that needed to get done that day and, instead, observed his comings and goings of this beautiful bird for the rest of the day. I was hooked.

Interested in what kind of bird he was and what he was doing, I accessed the Internet and began to do a little research. I found that he was an Eastern Bluebird and I read every article I could find. I quickly learned that I had committed many crucial errors in hanging the box; I placed the box on a fence post, facing west, with no predator protection, in direct afternoon sunlight. However, as I finished my initial education, I read that I should not be discouraged if I do not see any bluebirds approach a new nest box in the first two or three seasons. So, I thought to myself that "my birds" must like something about the box if they took to it this quickly, and I left it alone.

The next day, Mrs. Bluebird had also arrived. It was a pure joy to read about the courting process of bluebirds as it played out in front of me. Before long, the female was in full nest-building mode. Ultimately the nest yielded four young bluebirds that all fledged. I was amazed.

I cleared out the nest after all of the young were gone and another nest was built in its place. It was used throughout the summer. However, no more eggs were present for the rest of the year. The family remained all year long and throughout the winter.



In February of this year, I moved the nest box to the other side of the yard, facing east and into some afternoon shade created by the fence itself. The nest box was, again, immediately occupied within an hour of being moved. It has a very active couple as its occupants and currently houses a nest with four eggs. It may be the same parents from last year but I cannot tell for sure.

I have observed the nest weekly and know that the eggs have been in the nest for at least 7 days. I am hopeful that we will soon have another set of new bluebirds in existence. I am also hopeful that the new, somewhat cooler location will provide a better environment to induce more than one set of nestlings.

My experience has been an accidental but complete success and has provided for endless enjoyment as well as up-close and personal involvement with one of nature's most beautiful creatures. It is good to know that such enjoyment is also helping to support a once struggling species continue to recover and thrive for a long time to come.

Author and photographer: **Larry Hubbard**

## Volunteers are APPRECIATED!

Katy Couvillion	Roberta Marshall	Deborah Rayfield
Linda Crum	Ellie Mosley	Rex Reves
Jennifer Fleming	Paul Nelson	Meg Scamman
Harold Latham	Debbie B. Park	Norm Shoemaker
Don Lawrence	John Park	Pauline Tom
Kenlyn Lawrence	Judy Ray	Ron Tom
Jim Marshall	Ken Ray	Jimmie Tyler
Patti Marshall	Dan Rayfield	Diane Yakel

## Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

Appealing Gardens Landscape	David & Ora Keetley
Beth Becker	Ross Waldrop Krape
Marcy & Greg Brazaitis	R.L. Langley
Brett and Marlisa Briggs	Sue Lowes
Tom & Cindy Brisko	Megan McConnell
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Ginny Hester	Shelly Weber
Joey & Karen Hodges	Charline Wilkins
Karen A. Hodgson	David W Work
Bruce & Vickie Houff	



**There are many ways to VOLUNTEER!**

Donna Piercy is working with Mark Claburn to establish the Tierre Verede Bluebird Project. See project details and this year's results in the next issue of TX Blues!



Photo by Jo Beth Reeves Goodrum

*Donation Dollars  
= More Nestboxes*

## Welcome New Members!

*New members who give us print permission on Membership Form*

- Anne Alderfer
- Heather Anderson
- Gloria Barker
- Carolyn Blake
- Courtney Blood-Malecki
- Brett and Marlisa Briggs
- Carol A Buckland
- Joshua F. Bucy
- Richard Buse
- Catherine Collins
- Kerry Conkling
- Robeet Courson
- Deborah Cox
- Lennie Deagen
- Heather & Steven Dills
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- Wing Schensema
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- Mark Weiss
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- Juda York
- RC, Georgetown
- LC, Liberty Hill
- LC, San Antonio
- LC, Mountain City
- MBC, Pearland
- JC, Georgetown
- BF, Cleburne
- FH, Montgomery
- kmv, Cleburne
- JP, Willis
- MR, Midlothian
- RS, Burleson
- JT, Picton
- JW, Willis

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

### 2015 Summer Symposium Mail-In Registration Form

**ADVANCE Snail Mail Registration** (Includes Box Lunch)  
On-line registration available at [RSVPbook.com/2015event](http://RSVPbook.com/2015event)

**Registrant #1**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Registrant #2 (same street address)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

# Registrants (Please circle)	Description	Cost
1 2	Member	\$15.00
1 2	Non Member	\$15.00
1 2	Friday Dinner	\$15.00
1 2 3 4	Frozen Margarita	\$ 4.00

Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Total Due: \_\_\_\_\_

New \$15 Membership at this event includes **FREE** nestbox!  
Do you plan to join at the meeting?  Yes  No

(This is not a firm commitment for membership. Please do not send membership dues now.)

To register more attendees, please include an additional sheet with your mailing.

**For Planning Purposes Only**

1. TBS Members and New Members: TBS will give you a FREE nestbox at this event if you pledge to "NestWatch" at least 2 nestboxes (submit observations to Cornell Lab of Ornithology through [www.nestbox.org](http://www.nestbox.org)).  
Do you plan to participate?  Yes  No  N/A

2. \$15 Nestboxes available for purchase (based upon availability).  
How many do you plan to purchase? \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Registration Form with Payment made payable to "Texas Bluebird Society" to: TBS Event Registration  
P.O. Box 40868  
Austin, TX 78704

**EARLY BIRD** Registration—Deadline July 8, 2015  
**STANDARD** Registration—Deadline July 25, 2015  
**AT-THE-DOOR** Registration available (no lunch or door price changes)

Source: Web

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#### Contact Us:

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512.268.5678 (Pauline)

[www.txblues.org](http://www.txblues.org)

*All cavity-nesting birds are protected by federal law.  
Do not disturb birds or nest. Monitor and report  
activity to NestWatch.*

Photo by Jennifer Bryan



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March ■ May ■ July ■ October  
Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send street or email address  
changes to Norm Shoemaker at:  
[records@txblues.org](mailto:records@txblues.org)  
or send to P.O. Box. 40868  
Austin, TX 78704

#### Need Nestboxes?

Go to [www.txblues.org](http://www.txblues.org)

Click *Nestbox Distributor* tab  
for nearest location.