

# TEXAS Blues



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**GOAL:** Collect house sparrow (HS) eggs & test management strategies  
**TASK:** Swap and/or collect and ship HS eggs; monitor nestbox outcome

People who monitor bluebird nestboxes can collect eggs of house sparrows and donate them to the collection at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences. Participants can opt to receive painted wooden eggs to swap into nests to keep house sparrows committed to the nest attempt instead of disrupting any other nests.

Participants monitor nest boxes and report the outcome of the egg removal or egg swap. Eggs in the collection will eventually be analyzed for contaminants as part of research to determine whether house sparrow eggs are useful bioindicator of human exposure to environmental contaminants.

## TBS encourages you to participate in this important research!

Go to [Sparrow Swap](#) to learn more information on the project and how to ship the eggs..

[www.facebook.com/sparrowswap](http://www.facebook.com/sparrowswap) provides inside peak of the project.

The Sparrow Swap's weekly Facebook post is featuring citizen science house sparrow egg contributor, Keith Kridler, from Mount Pleasant, Texas. Keith is undoubtedly the most prolific bluebird habitat provider and monitor I could have ever imagined. Keith is a Charter Member of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) formed in 1978, and is co-founder of the Texas Bluebird Society. He conducts events at schools and elsewhere to teach kids and adults about Eastern Bluebirds. He had donated thousands of nest boxes and helped others to build their own. Keith co-authored "The Bluebird Monitor's Guide" for Cornell University's School of Ornithology. And Keith has conducted many experiments and surveys that shed light on the behavior of cavity nesting birds. These include offering paired boxes (side by side and over-under), pairing boxes with with different sized entrance holes, coloring house sparrow eggs to look like cowbird eggs to determine if the mother sparrow will reject them, and many more.

So Keith is helping The Sparrow Swap again this year. We recently received his first shipment of 26 house sparrow eggs



*"While this may look like a successful Easter egg hunt, we actually have just received our first shipment of house sparrow eggs at the museum. Looks like our new packaging method is a success! Only 2 of the 26 house sparrow eggs shipped from Texas were broken. Very exciting!"*

that he swapped out with the egg replicas that the NCMNS provides. Because of improvements we've made to the egg packaging protocol this year, only two of these eggs were lost due to breakage compared to a nearly 50% overall breakage rate of eggs shipped to us last year. Additionally, Keith has been a rich source of data and information about bluebird nesting successes, including records of nest monitoring data that he has collected on his own for decades as well as providing us with his own ideas about house sparrow management.

We want to thank Keith Kridler and all of our participants in this year's Sparrow Swap for their efforts to supply our staff with this valuable resource of house sparrow eggs. We look forward to the process of curating these eggs, getting them

tested for persistent environmental pollutants, and analyzing all the data gathered and returned by our nest monitors. This data, we hope, will also lead us to the strategies that are most effective in managing house sparrow populations.

## Martin House Provides Another HOSP Control Option

By Paul Nelson

For the first time, I have a purple Martin house up. Some of my neighbors moved away who had a purple Martin house. They took the house with them, and it broke my heart when I saw purple martins returning to find their house was gone.

I ordered one, put it up, and I had Martin's claiming it in just a few minutes!! Well, a benefit to the Martin house is that it has 12 rooms in it... this has proven to be plenty for many families of purple martins to move in while house sparrows take over a couple of rooms. I then trap them and dispose of them....over and over again. The HOSP seem to much prefer the Martin house over the bluebird house.



The bluebirds have been almost uninterrupted, and the HOSP have only taken over unoccupied Martin rooms. So far the martins have not been kicked out of their rooms from what I can tell.

It's been encouraging, albeit annoying that as soon as I destroy one HOSP another comes right in to replace it.

*Linda Crum, our HOSP control advocate, also monitors her Purple Martin house to keep it House Sparrow free. "I catch all my HOSP in my Martin house. Got three in one day"*

Humane extraction of House Sparrows is an important aspect of conservation for all songbirds.



Purple Martin eggs

## Bluebirds Are Busy Raising Their Families!



(Below) Hatched four on 4/23/2016. Fledged 5/13/2016. Where there were four, one remained. But it will soon join its family. Baby blues in the wind! Robin Jackson

Thank you Charlene Lane for your professional-quality photos of my precious bluebirds in suburbia McKinney! Submitted by Paul Nelson and Kelly Russell Nelson.



(Below) This is our first successful nest this year. We kept stealing sparrow eggs from the boxes until they gave up and left. We also have plenty of Mealworms in the fridge. The mockingbirds are aggravating but the parents of these eggs are holding their ground. Cynthia Parker Young



Want to see more great photos?  
visit  
[www.facebook.com/TexasBluebirdSociety](http://www.facebook.com/TexasBluebirdSociety)



## Musings from the Master -

Keith Kridler, everyone's resident expert, our favorite speaker, and co-founder 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. This is an edited excerpt from the Bluebird Monitors Yahoo Group. (**Hear Keith at our Bluebird Season Kickoff, March 25, 2017 at Waco Convention Center. [2017event.txblues.org](http://2017event.txblues.org)**)

### Keith Shares His Thoughts On Unmatched Egg

*Shirley Hrobar, sent this photo asking, "Should I remove the two unmatched eggs from the nest?"*

I normally wait three or four days, before I try to remove any un-hatched eggs. It is normal for only 80 out of 100 wild bird eggs, from the smaller species of song birds to hatch and survive the first few days.



The egg under the head of the baby bluebird shows the "air sack" line at the large end of the egg. This one probably will not hatch as a just about to hatch out baby bird will displace this air chamber and the eggs should be all opaque at this time. You should see other eggs that

are pipped, have the dimples showing where the baby birds are pressing their egg tooth out through the membrane and thin egg shells. They have to do this in order to get more oxygen through the porous egg shells. Notice how glossy, shiny these eggs are when they have been incubated the last 12 days or so.

What you saw as a "white marble" on your phone screen was just the white membrane from the inside of the egg. You were looking at the inside of the egg shell. Female bluebirds often eat egg shells to replace the calcium that they lost while laying the eggs. Song Birds in general can rob calcium from their bones while laying a clutch of eggs, then they can re-build bone loss by eating insects and or foods that are high in calcium.

Note: Keith followed up with a clarification. It is *not* necessary to remove unhatched eggs and usually he does not. There is great risk of breaking.

Final outcome...The babies are growing! I don't think the last two eggs are going to hatch. This is my first nest this year. The blues checked on the box all winter and at nesting time. The battle with the sparrows started. Bluebirds won. Shirley



**Interesting!** (photos 1, 2, 3 L-R below) Ron Tom left a pile of ashe juniper (cedar) logs near a fence. For first nesting this year, Eastern Bluebirds built nest almost entirely of "cedar" bark strips. Feet away, Bewick's Wrens included cedar bark with sticks and leaves. Keith Kridler suggests this may keep the bugs away.



In photo 4 (above R), the "cotton top" on a Black-crested Titmouse nest came from bits of unbleached cotton batting President Pauline Tom places around the yard as potential nesting material. A close look at photo 1 shows that even the bluebirds used some cotton tufts!

## Not A Casual Observer!

Article/photos by Kate Moran.



*Kate recently moved from Virginia to Sugarland, Texas. A little different environment? You bet. However, one thing remained the same; she loves birds! New TBS member Kate shares her story.*

Nope, I never was. Never will be. I just make sure to schedule "relaxation" now into my many projects. If there is something I like or am curious

about, I start off with reading (and then read some more, just in case). Then, I dive right in full force!

I'd like to say that birding was in my blood starting at a young age, but no. I mean, I knew the difference between a Blue Jay and a Cardinal, but that was the extent of my curiosity... THEN.

My husband and I bought our first house in Virginia, and my first visitor was a Bluebird. I had to look it up though in Google "small bird that is blue in color with a reddish bib." Bluebird sounded too simple of an answer. Then I researched what they ate. Next thing I did was buy a feeder and put mealworms in it. Mine liked dry and live—not picky. Ok great start! Then casual observer mode quickly disappeared. My husband saw it in my eyes. During our down time from work (which wasn't often due to us becoming new parents shortly after buying our home), I'd tap my fingers on the kitchen table, look outside, and zone out thinking about what my next plan for the birds would be. Then, I really got involved!

I'm pretty sure I'm preaching to the choir on this one, but Bet Zimmerman's Sialis website became my new go-to Bible. I memorized it! I set up a bird box in my backyard that first Spring. I had a couple check out the box that same day and start nesting the next week. That was easy! Then I started to worry about them. My poor husband would check our front porch for the latest delivered package and hear me exclaim "YES, the sparrow spooker and Van Ert trap finally got here!" My vocabulary was never the same again.

My first year (one box), my Bluebird couple had 2 successful nestings and popped out 9 healthy babies. I'm also a labor and delivery nurse, so this made me particularly proud. Since then, I was there for every backyard hatching, fledging, and growing-up stages. For the next couple of years I ended up setting up paired boxes in my backyard, extending more boxes to set up a

neighborhood trail, volunteering with Virginia Bluebird Society to monitor other local trails, and was in the process of helping my local rehab center for bird questions and/or emergencies. Sometimes, I'd imagine myself to be Bet Zimmerman and took tons of progression pictures of my many Bluebird, Chickadee, and Tree Swallow nestlings (which you're not supposed to do—I just got carried away).



In addition, my son and I frequented the Virginia State Parks system often, and I ended up giving bird tours to parents/children and other "casual observers." Exposure, exposure, exposure!

Then my husband got a job transfer to Texas, and my first thought was "do they have indoor plumbing there?" KIDDING! My parents moved to Houston years ago, and my in-laws are from Austin, so it was a great move. I did cry leaving our Virginia house because I left one box up in my backyard for the new owners as my Bluebird couple had already laid eggs in it.

The rest of the boxes I dismantled because I didn't want it to become another abandoned trail. The move wasn't bad, and I immediately analyzed my surroundings for potential backyard box or trail in Sugar Land. I was told the majority of Blues are up in north Houston, in the Woodlands area, when I emailed TBS before my move (isn't that what everyone does before they move?). I've lived in Houston now going on one month, and I have to say they're right so far about the lack of bluebirds in my specific location.



New backyard view.



You'd think that I'd have the "blues" about it, but NO! Work with what you have! We're here for ALL cavity nesters (and other bird species if you branch out more). I realized I have a HUGE Tree Swallow population by me.

So right now I'm in the process of finding out who in the city to contact to set up a small trail on the city property behind my house. When I see all the land around me, I don't just think it's pretty...I see potential for more trails!

Take away: As long as you don't stress yourself out too much, not being a casual observer can be a good thing. This applies to anything that sparks your interest. It's

actually beneficial to your health to be involved... releases endorphins. Trust me, I'm a nurse. Something about always having goals keeps you young. I'm willing to bet anyone reading this can relate to what I'm saying. And not that I can dedicate as much as I'd like to, with caring for a toddler and juggling work and competitive sports training (rowing in my case), but every little effort counts. That can mean something as simple as your contribution to being a TBS member or becoming the next Bluebird Man (or woman). I'd love to talk more about my birding adventures: the day my medical credo of "do no harm" went out the window when I decided to become a sparrow killer, my brush with public prejudice/stereotyping with regard to the "types of people" who are believed to be birders and conservationists, my rescue attempts of injured non-cavity nesting birds while I was out rowing. But, I'll save those for another time.

I'm just glad to be in Texas, and I look forward to helping in the little ways I can—**but not as a casual observer.**



Side view of a Tree Swallow nest

President Pauline notes:

Kate, in Sugarland, lives fairly near Brazos Bend State Park. We wish Kate success in attracting Tree Swallows to nestboxes. NestWatch has almost no records of Tree Swallow nests in a nestbox in Texas. *Texas Blues, Volume 8, Issue 3* reported the 2009 nesting of Tree Swallows at that park, in the cavity of a snag in the water "as Tree Swallows begin to stay in some parts of Texas year-round." Birders from around the state traveled to see the sight. Keith Kridler commented, "There may be larger numbers of Tree Swallows nesting in Texas only the people that have them don't know what they have nesting." In other states, Tree Swallows use "bluebird" nestboxes. Watch for a white feather-lined nest with white eggs. Please send word to TBS and report to [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org). Good luck, Kate!!! (One nest was reported to NestWatch in 2009. There were no other NestWatch entries until this year.

Is there a tree swallow nest in your area? Report to [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org)

**Typical Tree Swallow nest description:** Nest of grass or pine needles, usually lined with feathers. Feathers often placed to curl up over eggs. Flatter cup (about 2" diameter, up to 1.5" deep) than bluebirds. Occasionally contain mosses, rootlets, aquatic vegetation, and other plant materials. Some trash possible: cloth, paper, plastic, tinsel, cellophane, rubber bands, birchbark, often white. Photo by Bet Zimmerman, [sialis.org](http://sialis.org).

## TBS Celebrates 15 Years!

In 1971 a few folks, the charter members of a new organization, **Texas Bluebird Society**, gathered in the backyard of Pauline and Ron Tom to begin the huge commitment to a labor of love — the conservation of bluebirds, and other cavity-nesters, in Texas. We've come a long way since that warm September day!

Anecdotes - facts - photos tell the story in the next issue. Share your early memories with us! Send to [editor@txblues.org](mailto:editor@txblues.org) by September 1<sup>st</sup>.



## Native Plants Attract Wildlife: Create A Thicket

by Jane Tillman

You've noticed how birds will stymie your best birdwatching efforts by disappearing into a tangle of shrubbery. There they can forage undisturbed, and take shelter. Many birds feel vulnerable in our typical landscapes of St. Augustine grass and specimen oaks. Add some understory plants that attract tasty insects or provide berries, nectar, or seeds, and you will be thrilled at the variety of birds that drop in.



Thickets not only serve our resident birds like the Northern Cardinal, but can be crucial refueling habitat for migrant birds. Different birds occupy different parts of the vertical landscape, some preferring the high-rise life, while others are content on the ground floor, and still others "flit" somewhere in between. Look up to see our endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler, since it feeds high in the canopy. On the other hand look low for the Carolina Wren which is attracted to thickets and tangles.

How do you start your thicket? Choose different layers of plants: canopy trees, shorter mid and understory trees and shrubs, perennials, groundcovers and vines. The layers will fill in and actually touch each other. Your tallest canopy and midstory trees might already be in place. Even the much-maligned cedar is a plus. Put native flowering or evergreen understory trees on either side. Then plant fruiting evergreen and deciduous shrubs. If your yard is small, omit the canopy trees and select midstory ones that are in scale with your landscape, like the Lacey Oak, and look for compact varieties of shrubs like Dwarf Wax Myrtle. Place nectar sources for hummingbirds and butterflies around the edges. Tie it all together with a vine or two.

Think thick. Plan for your vegetation to have at least a six-foot wide footprint. Plant plants closer together than the spacing directions recommend. Since your landscape

is dynamic, eventually some plants will out-compete others, but that is okay. To speed your thicket's thickening ability and to cut down on expense, include a few thicket-forming plants. Instead of mowing right up to the perimeter of your thicket, let the volunteer suckers pop up. Your mowing chores will decline as your thicket expands.

Your plant choices are going to vary depending on your location, soil and light conditions. Visit a natural area close to your house to get ideas for the plant mix. If deer are a problem, discreetly cage your entire thicket until it gets big enough to fend for itself. Thickets aren't much fun for you or the deer to walk through.



As time goes by, your birds will help your thicket evolve, depositing seeds in their droppings. Let nature take its course. And congratulate yourself on creating a bed and breakfast for our feathered friends.

What to plant? One of the best sources for native plants recommendations is the Native Plant Information Network, a service of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. Texas is a big state, and it has been split into eco-regions in their special native plant collections. After you select your region, you can generate plant recommendations based on your landscape needs for various plant heights as well as light and moisture.

<https://www.wildflower.org/collections/>



Select your region for recommended native plants.  
 Texas - East  
 Texas - Central  
 Texas - North Central  
 Texas - West  
 Texas - High Plains  
 Texas - South

## Volunteers are APPRECIATED!

TBS has hosted a booth at local festivals since 2001, often at the same festivals every year. For example, TBS has a huge presence at the ever popular Wills Point Bluebird Festival held in April.

In addition to the our standard booth, TBS also hosts bus tours to nearby Lake Tawakoni State Park. Volunteer and new Board Member, Lonnie Castleman, explains bluebird habitat, behavior, and conservation tips as he leads a group along the TBS bluebird trail in the park.



With our "Free Nestbox With Membership" promotion TBS has added many new members at the festivals which equates to many new nestboxes installed for our bluebirds and other cavity-nesters.

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Mark Carlson         | Kevin Nelson       |
| Lonnie Castleman     | Paul Nelson        |
| Letitia Castleman    | Hazel Powell       |
| Linda Crum           | Jimmy Powell       |
| Walter Davis         | Rex Reves          |
| Jennifer Fleming     | Ann Thames         |
| Elaine Lambright     | Richard Thames     |
| Lloyd Lambright      | Pauline Tom        |
| Jerald Mowery        | Ron Tom            |
| Kelly Russell Nelson | Vanessa Vosisinnet |

**Do you have a favorite festival?  
Volunteer to host a TBS booth!**

Contact [tbs@txblues.org](mailto:tbs@txblues.org) for materials, advice, and assistance on hosting a booth.

## Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

- Richard Carmichael
- Maryann Coleridge
- Steve and Doris Goodman
- David Lott
- Diane Meiss
- Kyle Mills

- Bonnie Peterson
- Kim Powell
- Annette Reiger
- Mkoria Schilke
- Janet Stockard
- Larry Werkmeister

Donations  
Buy  
Nestbox  
Supplies



Photo by Jo Beth Reeves Goodrum

## Welcome New Members!

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

- |                       |                     |                             |                        |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| • Janet Alexander     | • Marjorie Griffin  | • Monty McLane              | • Ray Porter           |
| • David Beving        | • Chad Gross        | • Tracie Meredith           | • Karen Prather        |
| • Shirley Billingsley | • Ursula Hammes     | • Carol J Meyer             | • Gary L. Reece        |
| • Carlyn & Bob Bluis  | • Tara Harms        | • Freida Miller             | • Annette Regier       |
| • Mary Bridges        | • Darla Hatton      | • Kyle Mills                | • Moira Schilke        |
| • Dr. Jeanette Bynumn | • Mary Hokit        | • Howard Minor              | • Linda & Steve Sucher |
| • Amanda Childress    | • Janice Hulsey     | • Mr. & Mrs. Randy Molandes | • Cathy Thompson       |
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| • Jeff Dunn           | • Fred Koberg       | • Paul & Linda Ogle         | • John Wolf            |
| • Larry Fondren       | • Pam Latham        | • Donna Overton             | • Rhonda Wright        |
| • Geraldine Foster    | • George Lillard    | • Lila Parker               | • Louis Zettler III    |
| • Richard Geib        | • David Lott        | • Warren Parker             |                        |
| • Linda Gowin         | • Lenee McDonald    | • Pam Pierce                |                        |

• TA, Trinity • SB, Duncanville • SB, Marshall • MC, Fort Worth • EC, Spring • JC, Colleyville • MD, Fort Worth • SF, Fort Worth • SG, Argyle • DG, Nacogdoches • JG, Lufkin • CH, Kingsland • GJ, Fort Worth • HJ, Houston • MK, Nacogdoches • GL, Nacogdoches • BL, Nacogdoches • CM, River Oaks • CM, Tomball • BM, Whitt • KG, Hurst • RP, Lake Kiowa • HP, Johnson City • MP, Richardson • RR, Richards • RR, Lufkin • BH, Bastrop • TT, Lufkin • JT, Johnson City • BV, Johnson City



## Bluebird Nestbox

Please do not disturb. This nestbox provides a cavity for bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds.

To learn more, please email [info@txblues.org](mailto:info@txblues.org)



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

## Do you have a nestbox visible to others?

Display our "Please Do Not Disturb" educational nestbox sign. This sign, our "Bluebird Habitat" sign, and other TBS merchandise is available from Johnson City Sign Shop. ([www.shop.johnsoncitysignshop.net](http://www.shop.johnsoncitysignshop.net))

Many thanks to Rick Johnson for creating "our" new nestbox sign, envisioned by TBS member (and our Bluebird Season Kickoff emcee), Paul Nelson.



## Bluebird Season Kick-off

March 25, 2017

at Waco Convention Center



### Bluebird Season Kick-off

March 25, 2017 Waco Convention Center

[2017event.txblues.org](http://2017event.txblues.org)

Great speakers, demonstrations, and info/tips you will want to know for the nesting season!

Featured Speakers: Keith Kridler, Alec Wyatt and Dave Kinneer (photographer),

Details and registration in next newsletter. Visit [2017events.txblues.org](http://2017events.txblues.org)

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



This is our Bluebird couple's 2nd brood in their new nest box from the Texas Bluebird Society. There are 5 babies this time and they are ready to fledge. Mother and Daddy have been flying around in front of the box with crickets trying to get this one to come out. Daddy finally fed one to him.

5-25-2016 Polk Co.

Photo by Betty Hickman

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March ■ May ■ July ■ October

Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send stories/photos to [editor@txblues.org](mailto:editor@txblues.org)

Send email/address changes to [records@txblues.org](mailto:records@txblues.org)

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