Nestbox building is booming for Bluebirds of Happiness

TBS distributes nestboxes built by volunteers with materials purchased with donations.

Through our signature “One Nestbox” booths at local festivals, we distribute a starter nestbox and a packet of educational materials in exchange for a TBS membership.

We’re enjoying a nestbox building boom!

Festival outreach brought 375 people into Texas Bluebird Society with the “One Nestbox” offer in 2008. New members located their 375 nestboxes on private property in Texas. Each nestbox is well constructed and designed for Texas conditions. Over 80% of the individuals who joined through this plan were not previously involved in bluebird conservation.

Texas Bluebird Society spends no dollars on fund-raising and very little on administration as we spread “Bluebirds Across Texas … one nestbox at a time.”

$8.00 purchases materials for a nestbox. Please consider a donation just for “nestbox lumber.”

The IRS recognizes Texas Bluebird Society as a “charitable” 501c3 organization. Donations are tax deductible as allowed by law. Your extra gift, in any amount, would be most helpful.

Interested? Donate through the secured donations section on the website or mail to the TBS address shown on this page.

We extend a special thank you to those who made an end of the year donation for nestbox lumber before this edition’s printing deadline.

Nestbox Lumber Donors:
- Eva Schulze
- Dayle Enderson
- Catherine Gero
- Joyce Valdez
- Judith Deaton
- Michelle Mahaffey

TBS Members—we’re among the first outsiders to view these two rarest of rare Bluebird eggs!!

Mary Leyendecker describes incredible details. Page 2

Nestbox Building Boom

TBS members are spreading Bluebirds Across Texas in record numbers. The Bluebird Habitat sign program is back on track thanks to Ron Tom and Ron Tom Associates. Ron Tom (at right) installed the first sign on his gate in Oatmeal with Ron Tom (at left). TBS seeks a vendor to accept one-by-one online orders for a weather-resistant 9” x 12” sign at a reasonable price that includes Priority Mail shipping. For bid information or to recommend a source, please contact Pauline Tom, 512.268.5678.

TBS Photo Stream

rolling on Flickr

easy to access, fun to use

The Photo Library of Texas Bluebird Society now appears as a Flickr Photo Stream. It is a work in progress, currently divided into six sections: Bluebirds; Bluebird Life Cycle; Bluebird Nests and Nestboxes; Other Cavity Nesters; Predators; Events. Access the photo stream through the Photo Gallery section of www.texasbluebirdsociety.org.

Photographers of all skill levels are invited to submit images – especially, photos taken in Texas. It’s easy to donate a photo to the TBS Photo Gallery. Please follow the instructions found online. TBS accepts photos only from the photographer.

SIGNMAKER NEEDED

Our “Bluebird Habitat” sign program hit a snag after Mike Whelan (at right) installed the first one on his gate in Oatmeal with Ron Tom (at left). TBS seeks a vendor able to accept one-by-one online orders for a weather-resistant 9” x 12” sign at a reasonable price that includes Priority Mail shipping. For bid information or to recommend a source, please contact Pauline Tom, 512.268.5678.
Two abnormal bluebird eggs saved, donated to TBS

By Mary Leyendecker

Abnormal bluebird eggs declared "one in 10 million" have been donated to the TBS permanent collection for viewing by thousands at EXPO, announced Pauline Tom, president.

The clutch, a dwarf and a double yolk, startled Dorothy Reeves, an avid bluebirder and bluebird trail monitor for over 20 years. Having experienced numerous successful fledglings over the years, Dorothy expected "no surprises" during her routine fall maintenance in October 2008.

Dorothy recalls that the box had a nest early in the year that fledged three birds, with no eggs left unhatched. "Then when I went to clean it out, there were these two weird eggs!" The nestbox where these eggs were found is located 19 miles east of Stephenville in Erath County.

The copyrighted photograph provided on Pg. 1 by the Reeves Family includes a normal egg added for comparison. TBS members are among the first to view this photo. It will be shared with Cornell Lab of Ornithology and select birding magazines.

The bizarre discovery was greeted with jubilation by Keith Kridler, TBS Technical Advisor.

"I have never seen or heard of anyone finding both a dwarf egg and a double yolk egg in the same bluebird nestbox. The long egg is probably a double yolk. Two of the yolks accidentally moved up into the oviduct at the same time rather than just one moving up a day.

"Since this threw out the normal progression of one egg a day forming around a normal yolk, the following day the small eggshell formed around just the white without a yolk. This creating the dwarf egg in the photo. Of course this could have been reversed and the dwarf formed first and then the double yolk egg, as is common in laying hens.

"Finding either a dwarf or double yolk is probably one in 10,000 in bluebird nests. I have only found three in forty years of checking nests. So this is probably a one in 10 million chance," said Kridler.

Texas Bluebird Society holds a Salvage Permit from USF&W and TP&W that allows those on the permit to collect eggs and nest contents. The permit must be used in compliance with the permit, a coulier will transport the irreplaceable eggs from West Texas to Central Texas.

Welcome, New Members!

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CP, Conroe</th>
<th>Elizabeth McDaniels</th>
<th>JH, Pflugerville</th>
<th>FC, San Antonio</th>
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<td>Groesbeck</td>
<td>Ariana Rodriguez</td>
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<td>Reyna, Austin</td>
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<td>Pella, Cedar Park</td>
<td>Mansfield</td>
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<td>CF, Utopia</td>
<td>Deborah &amp; Jimmy Gloria</td>
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<td>SB, Del Valle</td>
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<td>Mark &amp; Cathy Greenfield</td>
<td>MS, Brenham</td>
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<td>Larry W Lamely</td>
<td>Tom Foster, Leander</td>
<td>James &amp; Debbie Giroux, Austin</td>
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<td>Doohi Teipathi</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
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<td>Linda McKaske, Cedar Creek</td>
<td>SM, Mason</td>
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TBS members travel all over Texas for the cause of bluebirds. Ron and Pauline Tom (above) paused in their drive to deliver a habitat sign to landowner Mike Whelan (story, p. 1), for this ‘totally Texas’ moment. Two miles from the Whelan property, the citizens of Oatmeal have, yes indeed, installed an oatmeal box to advertise their community’s special event!
Linda is TBS Volunteer Extraordinaire!

Congratulations to Linda Crum, recipient of the 2008 TBS Blue Feather Award!

By Debbie Bradshaw Park

What is the Blue Feather Award, one might ask? It’s our group’s significant kudo to an individual who has made extraordinary efforts to promote the conservation of bluebirds, which makes them a “true blue” bluebird friend.

Linda has made a variety of contributions to TBS this year. First and foremost her talent as a speaker has put her at the top of the list for various organizations requesting bluebird presentations. Linda customized the Texas Bluebird Society’s educational slide presentation with her own photographs; some of the pictures are from her own backyard. The presentation, along with her bluebird knowledge and enthusiasm, encouraged scores of participants to join TBS and install nestboxes in their own backyards. Linda has made presentations to the Montgomery County Master Gardeners, Texas Master Naturalists (through the Lonestar College ALL Program), Fifth and Sixth grade students at Wilkerson Intermediate School, and Arbor Gate Nursery.

Linda’s volunteer skills were put to the test when she became the 2008 Summer Symposium Coordinator. Along with the help of a few other volunteers, Linda coordinated every aspect of this highly successful event from start to finish. The Symposium, a daylong program about bluebirds, attracted 34 participants to the sessions held in The Woodlands. As well as running the show, Linda found the time to speak on a subject she is very concerned about, “How to Deal with House Sparrows.” Linda has handed the coordinator torch to Lysle Mockler.

In the new year, she vows to continue to raise earthworms in her sewing room (for her garden, not for bluebirds), volunteer at the County Extension Office as a Master Gardener, volunteer to teach compost classes, and continue her treasurer responsibilities and speaker schedule for TBS.

Who knows what else she might volunteer to do! After all, the very first volunteer duty Linda performed was as Registrar for the 2006 National Bluebird Association Conference in San Antonio. That was no small chore; to say the least, Linda thrives on large-scale projects, such as supporting the TBS goal of “Bluebirds Across Texas... one nestbox at a time.”

TBS members, associates, and professional colleagues in the birding world congratulate Linda Crum and affirm their “Thanks for all the wonderful volunteer chores you have accomplished for TBS. There is no one who deserves the Blue Feather Award more than you!”

**Gratitude and thanks!**

Items plus Buyers equal Success! Incredible response to the 2008 Symposium Silent Auction generated $1,034.00 for TBS bluebird conservation efforts.


**Annual Meeting Silent Auction Donors:** Nature’s Way Mealworms, Tim Vocke  Hill Country Adventures and Nature Center  Texas Parks and Wildlife, Mark Klym  Texas Books Festival  The Long Center for Performing Arts  Ron and Pauline Tom

Nana’s Housekeeping, Locations in Buda/Kyle  Timber Press Inc., Lake Boggan

**Eagle Scout Project donors**

(replacement nestboxes for Lake Tawakoni State Park)


**Summer Symposium Volunteers and Presenters**

Patti Marshall  Caryl Brewer  Cynthia Reid  Richard and Vanessa Voisinet  Carol Weitzel  Bill Griffith  Pauline Tom  Linda Crum  Jennifer and Johnny Fleming  Diana Foss  Kathy Adams Clark

**Texas Parks & Wildlife EXPO Volunteers**

Jim Anding  Doug Rohde, Presenter  Barb Ohman, Coordinator  Harry Evans  Susan Tartaglino  Jennifer, Pauline Tom

**Presentation to Robson Ranch Garden Club**

Doug Rohde, Presenter  Barb Ohman, Coordinator  Robson Ranch Garden Club

**Did we miss you?** PLEASE let us know!

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Did we miss you? **PLEASE let us know!**
Hornsby Bend Bluebird Trail restored to successful habitat
by Barbara Vinson

Pauline Tom, President of the Texas Bluebird Society contacted me in March 2008, asking me if I would be interested in monitoring nestboxes at Hornsby Bend Water Treatment Facility (near Austin Bergstrom International Airport) during nesting season. I let Pauline know that I would be delighted to take on the project with her guidance. I found the prospect of monitoring the nestboxes at Hornsby Bend of interest both as a learning experience as well as working to further the bluebird population.

Because I had been unsuccessful in attracting bluebirds to my property, I hoped to learn what would attract them. I also liked the idea of experiencing the incredible diversity of wildlife found at Hornsby Bend on a regular basis.

I met with Pauline Tom and Priscilla Muir from Travis Audubon Society on April 4 at Hornsby Bend where we located seven nestboxes. Four boxes were located along Platt Lane. Several of these had become occupied by carpenter ant colonies which made them unusable by bluebirds. Two nestboxes were located along the southern edge of the South Pond and one box was located in the pecan grove surrounding the Center for Environmental Research (CER) facility. Much to our delight during our tour of Hornsby Bend, a pair of Bluebirds was spotted in the vicinity of the CER.

On April 12, I returned to Hornsby Bend to start monitoring nestboxes. I decided which ones to replace and/or move and confirmed the location of all nestboxes with Kevin Anderson, the CER Coordinator. After discussions with Pauline, Priscilla, and Kevin, I put up five more bluebird nestboxes. Pauline suggested putting updated signs on the nestboxes which would serve to inform interested parties about the nestboxes and who to contact if they had needed more information.

By the end of April, I located all of the nestbox locations by GPS, added new signs to the exteriors of the nestboxes, and created a Hornsby Bend NestWatch program.

NestWatch, created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is a website to document in one central location the results of nest monitoring. Data can be entered into their online site at www.nestwatch.org.

I discovered the first eggs of the season on May 8: five bluebird eggs in one of the nestboxes by CER. By the beginning of June there were four nestboxes being used; three by bluebirds and one by a Carolina Wren. The bluebird nesting season for central Texas is usually February through July, but I did not get started monitoring and establishing new nestboxes until the middle of April. Even with this late start, the birds responded with five nests and 22 eggs. Although the eggs from the Carolina Wren nest and one bluebird nest did not hatch, one pair of bluebirds successfully raised two broods.

An interesting observation is that the nestboxes placed within the shady pecan grove were the only ones used by the bluebirds.

This was a surprise because all the articles I had read recommended placement of bluebird nestboxes in open grassland away from trees. I’m guessing that because of the heat, especially with the high temperatures that central Texas experienced this year, it becomes too hot within the nestbox for eggs and nestlings to survive later in the season.

In summary, an average of four eggs was laid per bluebird nest. Thirty percent of the eggs hatched. A total of five bluebird nestlings fledged. The last two bluebird nestlings fledged about August 11. It seems that the bluebirds will extend their nesting season by choosing cooler nesting sites if they are available.

Plans for the 2009 season are to start monitoring earlier in the nesting season and to place more nestboxes in open shady locations.

Backstory: TBS installed nestboxes donated by co-founder Keith Krüger at Hornsby Bend during our first year (2001-2002). Thereafter, its monitor relocated and the trail lost maintenance. When Priscilla Muir, Travis Audubon Society, advised TBS of nestbox conditions, thanks to TBS upgrades of technology by skilled volunteers, I referred to the new TBS Membership Map and found Barbara residing within a 30-min. drive of Hornsby Bend!

Barbara is test-driving NestWatch, a partnership technology embraced by TBS in support of national conservation research. Barbara enters her findings at each visit into NestWatch. This system is applicable to all TBS-sponsored trails. Records are online and easy to update. A substitute can monitor a trail and enter observations into the official records. Barbara’s weekly notes in NestWatch are reviewed by a TBS volunteer to provide electronic training. — Pauline Tom, interim Volunteer Coordinator

Happy New Year!

Roland Garza, Barbara Vinson

Value-added membership TBS Volunteers are Awesome

TBS MEMBERS donate a wealth of life experiences to our cause, “Bluebirds Across Texas … one nestbox at a time.” Seeing the need, Barbara Vinson offered to print on waterproof paper a new type of signage for the TBS-sponsored Hornsby Bend Trail. A VolunteerMatch graphic artist created the layout which promotes NestWatch and credits each entity that’s a part of the project. Barbara also has a camera! Among treasured images are the sight of a male Eastern Bluebird on a nestbox and the gorgeous bluebird eggs (shown).

“Thanks to Barbara’s initiative, we now expect to add similar custom signage to other TBS-sponsored projects, such as “Start With Five,” says Pauline Tom, TBS president. Start With Five is an outreach program through which TBS provides five nestboxes for non-private property under a set of conditions. Interested? Contact Sharon Kersten, Start With Five coordinator and NestWatch Ambassador at sharonkersten@earthlink.net.