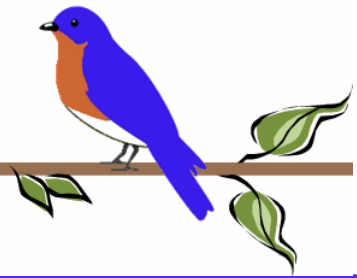


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter July 2015 • Volume 14. Issue 3

2015 Summer Symposium Guest Speakers

Keith Kridler, author and naturalist, *Bluebirds and More*



As a Charter Member of the North American Bluebird Society and co-founder of the Texas Bluebird Society, Keith Kridler loves bluebirds! His passion for bluebirds began in 1979, when he and his wife established what is now the oldest and most productive bluebird trail in Texas. In fact, upwards of 1,200 bluebirds have fledged from this trail **per year!** Keith is considered one of today's foremost authorities on bluebirds and is the co-author of *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*.



Alec Wyatt, 2014 ABA Young Birder of the Year, *Project Nestwatch* and *Passionate Birding: My Story*

Alec Wyatt is a 16-year-old birder from Colorado Springs, Colorado who recently relocated to San Antonio, Texas, and is very excited about the birding prospects there. Alec has been birding in eighteen states, but never outside the country. He enjoys all kinds of birds and birding and his favorite area of interest is conservation.

In 2014 Alec won the ABA Young Birder of the Year contest, a competition designed to help young birders build and enhance their birding skills. He enjoys monitoring his nest box trail - and entering his observations into NestWatch, leading bird walks for kids, and inspiring others to enjoy and protect birds.

Glenn Olsen, *Native Landscaping for Wildlife*

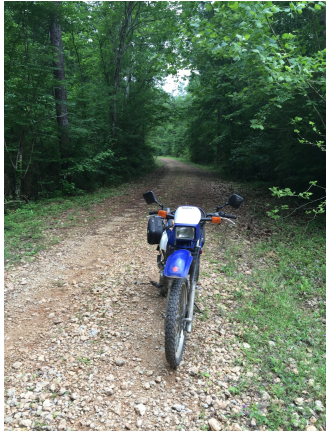
Glenn's passionate interest in nature began early in his childhood. In addition to bird identification, he has a special interest in the relationships of plants, birds, butterflies, and other insects. Glenn teaches Bird Identification and Nature Related classes at Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies and is an instructor for Audubon's Birding classes. He served as State President and Houston Chapter president of the Native Plant Society of Texas and is a certified Texas Master Naturalist. Glenn also leads professional birding and natural history tours for groups and individuals with recent trips to Big Bend, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Amazon Rain Forest and The Galapagos Islands.



Join us on August 8th for another great Summer Symposium! See txblues.org for more details

Bluebirds and Motorcycles - A Match Made In Heaven

How does a prestigious W. L. Moody, Jr., Professor and Chair in the Department of Pathology & Immunology at Baylor College of Medicine spend spring weekends? **Dr Tom Wheeler**, one of the first one hundred members, and long time TBS supporter, shares his adventures as he maintains and monitors a 100 mile bluebird trail - because he loves to ride and he loves bluebirds!



(Far left) Tom's trusty cycle, a Suzuki 200 cc on road/off road.

(Left) To properly maintain a bluebird trail by motorcycle, it is essential to carry everything you need with you in limited space. Note the clipboard for recording activity and the saddlebags with supplies. The machete and electric screwdriver/drill on top.



(Right) Better view of the cordless drill/screw driver and machete.



(Left) Boxes are occasionally damaged by squirrels attempting to enlarge the entrance hole.

(Right) For this contingency, I carry several "hole repair" parts shown here. The staples around the entrance hole discourage further damage by sharp toothed critters.



(Far right) Damage repaired.



(Far left:) Flying squirrels frequently take over a box that is on a wooden pole. This one had been abandoned and was removed. These animals are nocturnal so if they are not there during the day they have been killed/died outside of the nest.

(Left:) View of a flying squirrel that has taken over a box but not yet built a nest.

(Right:) Rat snake within bluebird box devoid of eggs or babies. A bad sign, especially when coupled with an adult bluebird feather. Dead mother bluebird on the ground beneath the snake-occupied box indicates that she was killed by the snake, probably suffocated when she returned to the nest and stuck her head in the box.



(Far right:) Leather gloves are helpful in removing snakes from the box. Nice view of the rat snake coiled in my hand. Next stop, a plastic bag that I carry with me. Properly confined in the plastic bag the snake is transported, alive, to a remote location and released, hopefully never to return.

Brown-headed Nuthatch Finds New Homes

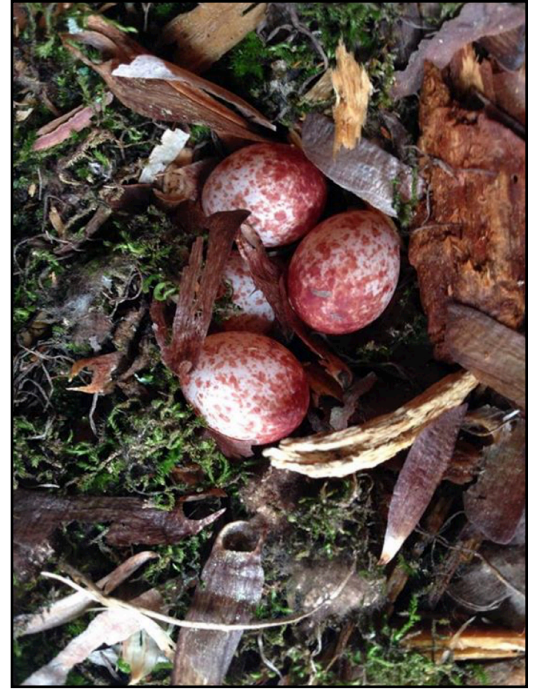
Several years back, a researcher in NC asked Texas Bluebird Society to consider restricting hole size in a few nestboxes in pine forests in order to provide potential nesting habitat for Brown-headed Nuthatch. At Jones State Forest (near Houston TX) hole-restricted nestbox, nuthatches were successful within a year or two.



Brown-headed Nuthatches DO need our help. We are helping by adding extra nestboxes with restricted hole size preventing bluebirds from usurping the Brown-headed Nuthatch nests.

These nuthatches are found in pine forests in southeast Texas. Favorite food, no surprise here, pine seeds.

These photos by **Linda Crum** were taken March 15, 2015 and March 22, 2015. Linda monitors the nestbox trail and reports nesting activity to nestwatch.org.



There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape the same as it was before.

Robert Lynd, *The Blue Lion and Other Essays*



This Bluebird Goes Natural

By **Cliff Shackelford**

I was pretty excited to find an Eastern Bluebird nesting in a natural cavity on Greg Grant's property on May 9th in Arcadia, TX (Shelby Co.). I've only seen one or two others in my life -- the rest were, of course, in manmade boxes.

The nest was about 28 feet high in a dead, topped loblolly pine that had a DBH (diameter at breast height) of approximately 10 inches (thus young and skinny). The cavity was likely constructed by a Red-bellied Woodpecker after the tree was dead and crumbly.

Our friend, **Elton Scifres**, took a photo of a nestling peering out of the hole -- including a zoomed-in close up.

In the enlarged photo, one can see many tiny round holes in the bark that were made by beetles which move in when the pine is dead or dying.

Love Those Bluebirds!

By Theresa Johnson

Okay, I'll admit it — I am having an affair. It started out innocently enough after a chance glimpse in the backyard. But soon, the glimpses quickly turned into hours of deliberate and determined watching! He was so different from the others I had seen in my backyard in Comal County, and after the purchase of new pair of Nikon binoculars, I was committed. The more I watched, the harder I fell for him. At dinnertime, my husband would find me with a journal in one hand and binoculars in the other. I even downloaded the Birdjam App onto my phone so I could identify his calls! Pretty soon, it was the only singing I could hear! After weeks of watching and jotting



Photo above/below courtesy of by Dr. Spencer Moore



down sightings and notes in my journal, I began reading anything and everything I could find on him. I quickly discovered that I was not the only one in love with bluebirds.

Soon I could identify the males from a distance not only by their brilliant color, but also by their shape and behavior. Bluebirds, it seems to me, don't flit about nervously from branch to branch like little wrens but are more patient -- especially when they are standing guard. The females, less physically striking, were a little harder to find. So, during the spring and summer courtship months, I've pretty much learned that if I can locate the male, the female won't be far away! The day I realized that bluebirds were actually building a nest in the bluebird house my mother gave me, I was a goner. Those first three blue eggs turned into three babies that flew away! At first, I couldn't believe I could monitor the nest without scaring them away. It didn't, and through that transparent panel I was able to watch a little miracle. Over the past several springs and summers, I have seen some beautiful successes. And, I'm certain that many of my friends are sick to death of hearing me blab on and on about bluebirds! (But, I hope not.)



Caption and photo by Gail Cuthbert Freiherr

It was their striking beauty that caught my eye, but those first three babies captured my heart, and I am committed that bluebirds flourish. I don't pretend to be an expert on bluebirds – I am a real estate agent by profession—so I continue to learn about bluebird conservation with the help of websites and organizations like the Texas Bluebird Society. I am constantly working on creating the perfect bluebird habitat. I read about establishing bluebird trails and now have five houses which, upon research, are probably too close together. For my birthday, my sister started me with a yaupon and a shallow birdbath. I quit buying cheap birdseed for my feeders in a feeble attempt to deter sparrows. I have almost completely traded monitoring activity in my journal for the Cornell Ornithology's NestWatch program on my computer.

Today when I checked, there was a fifth blue egg in the nest by the garden. For about a month, I've watched this bluebird pair house hunt. As a realtor, I have watched many a buyer deliberate on a house, so I fretted and worried that the female had a different house in mind -- maybe in a tree somewhere out in the pasture where I wouldn't be able to monitor. But a week ago the nest building began, today there are five eggs, and I am once again in love....

Cross Timbers Master Naturalists Create Nestbox Trail

Article by **Donna Piercy**, Master Naturalist

Tierra Verde Bluebird Trail was first discussed when members of the class of 2014 Cross Timbers Master Naturalists visited Tierra Verde Golf Course as part of their curriculum in October of '14. Tierra Verde is the first golf course in Texas and the first municipal course in the world to be honored as an Audubon Signature course. Mark Claburn, Arlington's Golf Course Superintendent, and I spoke about their bird population, and the seed for the Master Naturalist Project was born. I contacted the Texas Bluebird Society and Pauline Tom helped guide the process.

A collaborative effort between the Texas Bluebird Society, Cross Timbers Master Naturalists, and Tierra Verde allowed the placement of 12 nestboxes within the Tierra Verde grounds just before the breeding season started. The nestboxes were placed with the aid of Jim Marshall, of the Trinity Trails Bluebird Trail in Fort Worth, who became our TBS consultant. The snow and ice moved in shortly thereafter and lingered. The weather cleared enough for the volunteers to visit the nestboxes for the first time on March 3rd, but on March 5th, about 3" of snow accumulated. Jim returned soon after to help with the fine tuning – all that moisture had made opening the boxes difficult. We won't forget how fast the bluebird pairs worked to build nests after that.

Eleven Master Naturalists have assisted in the monitoring process which is twice a week. What a great group! Many members come out regularly and have made the whole project easier and more fun. Everyone has learned so much! Jim and Pauline have been available throughout.

Mark and the complete staff at Tierra Verde have been great and supportive. The golfers are friendly and many ask about the birds we are monitoring. We have gone over the lifecycle and breeding process with many people! Many want to recount their bird sightings. It is a phenomenal place for birding in general, and roadrunners are seen every foray. My personal favorite, other than the eastern bluebird, of course, is the red shouldered hawk, which is usually found near the largest pond and has been known to make low passes quite close to us. The golf cart acts as a bird blind, especially when you sit still for a moment. Animal adventures also abound including bobcats, foxes, raccoons, and rabbits.

During the first part of this first season, there were nests in 4 out of the 12 boxes. Three bluebird pairs built nests and successfully raised three clutches! At the beginning of the season, one of these bluebird pairs was observed evicting a lone Bewicks from the start of his nest. The fourth nest was a Bewick's that was never used.

The last bluebird clutch of round one left the nest May 3-5. The total: 11 fledges thus far. The first pair to nest in round one naturally also started the second round with the beginnings of a new nest appeared in nestbox #6 on May 8th. The area up to and around the box was mowed May 18th, and we didn't see bird activity after that. The four

eggs were abandoned and disappeared by May 26th. We are not sure what transpired here. One week later on June 2nd, the nest had been built up even higher and there were four new eggs!

With the first round, there were three eggs that did not hatch. No dead fledglings or adults were observed. All data have been reported in Nestwatch.

Two types of the parents' protection strategies have been observed. The early bird nest pair would always fly off when they heard/saw volunteers coming. They would remain close by in the trees observing the action. The last pair to build had a totally different strategy – dive bomb the two people approaching and opening the boxes each time. No house sparrows took residence, although they are usually spotted near the club house. No snakes have been encountered. Ants took over two of the boxes which hadn't been used by any cavity nesters. Tree Tanglefoot was successful in keeping ants from the four boxes with nests. As of May 22nd, it had been applied to six boxes including the two with ants. The ants found other homes. As we go into June, wasp nests in the baffles are being built in about half the nestboxes. Thus far, we have been able to remove them without insecticide spray or getting stung.

Our first season included the most rain in month of May ever! At this juncture, I am not sure how it affected us, although I would have expected more nest starts at this point in early June. We were able to monitor pretty much on schedule except for May 29th, when the course had to close. The pair in nestbox #6 have come through with a third batch of eggs, but we only have one other completed nest – a new location for us – but no eggs. I can't help but feel the almost constant rain has played a big part in less reproductive activity. I hope to hear from others on this subject.

My most enjoyable moments have come from watching the parents feed the hatchlings/fledglings. I observed the male entering one of the boxes with caterpillars and crickets much more than the female. Once the female sat on top of the box while the male was inside for over two minutes, then flew in to join him. She couldn't wait with her caterpillar any longer – and that coziness didn't last long. The male flew out immediately.

What a phenomenal start up! Thanks to everyone that has supported the effort. See you at the Summer Symposium.



Brent Franklin, Anne Alderfer, Donna Piercy busy installing the new trail in Arlington.

Photo by Dick Schoesch

Summer Photo Gallery



Experts tells us the babies from the first brood often help the parents feed the next set of fledglings. How wonderful that Kollette was able to capture this rarely seen event and share it with us! Photo by **Kollette Martin Studdert**.



(Left)
Discussing the latest news in the neighborhood
Photo by **Brad Roberts**.



(Right)
Always a pleasure to see a new brood.
These young ones hail from Texarkana. Photo by **Connie Comeaux**.



(Left)
Parents feed their young about five times an hour.

(Right)
Now we're talking, that's dinner for a growing family!

Photos by **Dr. Spenser Moore**.



Volunteers are APPRECIATED!

Great Job! Many thanks to our volunteer builders for producing the hundreds of nestboxes needed each year for our Texas bluebirds!

Jim Estes
(Lockhart)

Don Mitchell
(Midlothian)

Shannon Ramsey
(Timpson)



Latest batch of nestboxes from our volunteer builders, count 'em, 502!

Linda Crum
Walt Davis
Jacob Dye
Jennifer Fleming
Harold Latham
Don Lawrence
Christine Mille
Norm Shoemaker
Pauline Tom
Bob Yakel
Dee Yakel



Booth volunteers at the Blueberry Festival in Nacogdoches added 40 new members!

Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

Anne Alderfer
Amazon
Truett & Kay Bennett
Lauri Blake
Bill Bootz
Barbara Bruyers
Elizabeth Castro
Penne Ellis
Charles & Marilyn Eppler
Will Erwin
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Ann Stevenson
Patti Tate
Ron & Pauline Tom
Lacy & Dale Ward
Dr. Thomas Wheeler
Carolyn Whitehurst



Photo by Jo Beth Reeves Good-

*Donation Dollar\$
= More Nestboxes*

Welcome New Members!

New members who give us print permission on Membership Form

• Grady & Susan Abernathy• Ann Akers• Anne Alderfer• Martin & Laura Allen• Heather Anderson• Barbara Baggett• Gloria Barker• Angela Beasley• JoAnn Bentley• Carolyn Blake• Carol Blessing• Courtney Blood-Malecki• Helen Boothe• Kerry Brenner• Brett and Marisa Briggs• Carol A Buckland• Joshua F. Bucy• Robert C Buell• Ray Bunting• Richard Buse• Margy Butler• Belinda Carr• Barbara Casey• Elisabeth Castro• Tom Christ• Beverly Clark• Stewart & Marge Cochran• Danny & Linda Cochran• Catherine Collins• Kerry Conkling• Pearl Cornell• Robert Courson• Deborah Cox• Betty Cruikshank• Ed Cunningham• Lennie Deagen• Heather & Steven Dills• Susan Domsalla• Sandra Dowdy• Haley Duck• Terry & Fred Duncan• Pennie Ellis• Deanna Elvington• Christi Emmons• Will Erwin• Julie Farmer• Sondra Fox• Carolyn Franks• Roy Freeman• Martha French• Phyllis Fulton• Kevin Garraway• Linda Gerik• Eunice Gerloff• Renita Gibson• Kathy Giles• Jane Gillett• Laura & Ricky Gott• Sara Gouge• Hubert Greene• Terry Grogan• Judy Haldeman• Mari Hanley• Guy Hargrove• Gordon C Henry• Rena Henry• Lydia Holley• Amy Hook• Laurie Hopper• Kimberly Horn• Jeff House• Monique Hudman• David Hudman• Shirley Jarred• Suzanne Johnson• Robert Johnston• Sheila Kegley• Shelley Kellam• Brenda Kenyon• Elaine Lambright• Arthur LaMontagne• Sharon Lewis• Brian Lidington• Tiffany Lipsett• Pat Lundberg• Mike Lynch• Shelby & Thomas Magnuson• Bob & Linda Martin• Jesse Martinez• Ruth Massingill• M K McAnulty• Ms. Emma McBride• Terri McDow• Barbara McDowell• Kathy McHargue• Kathy Milenki• Christine Miller• Maureen / Kirk Moore / Hunter• Lisa Moser• Quonga Muhammad-Benjamin• Joyce Murphy• Jill Murphy• Jeremy Neesham• Bruce Nichols• Adrianna Olivarez• David Ott• Dan Parker• Valerie Parks• J.H. Partin• Pamela Patterson• Aiza Paulson• Stacy Peck• Darcy Petzold• Betty Jo Phillips• Matthew Porter• Jerry Robbins• Debbie Rockett• Mary Rodrigues• Lisa Rosado• Jay & Cindy Rubens• Terry R Russell• Susan Sanches• Wing Schensema• Leta Schmid• Elton Scifres• Ken Scott• Ted Shetzer• Kathy Short• Sharon Slagle• Terry Smith• Ron Smith• Ken Snider• Steven Snider• Deanna Speck• Melody Srader• Wayne Stafford• Quinn Stanford• Jenifer Stephenson• Ann Stevenson• Linda Stroud• Beverly Swyden• Kars Tamminga• Delina Taylor• Millynn Teal• Sharon Templeman• Daphne Templin• Nancy Thomas• Donnie Toal• Jo Vitek• Debbra Vogel• Vicki Vogel• Lacey & Dale Ward• Mark Weiss• Glenna White• Alyse White• Dianna Wild• Doris Williaford• Tim Willingham• Scott Wolf• Kathleen Worrell• Ginny Worthham• Juda York• Charla Young

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All cavity-nesting birds are protected by federal law.
Do not disturb birds or nest. 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 email/address changes to records@txblues.org



Celebrating 50 Years of Monitoring!

Volunteers have been helping the Lab monitor nesting birds for 50 years, keeping tabs on open-cup nests and nest boxes alike. What started as the North American Nest Record Card Program in 1965, and later became The Birdhouse Network, is now known as Nest-Watch. But the goal of these projects hasn't changed: collect quality data on nesting success across the country for use in "big picture" studies of bird reproduction.

Our nest-monitoring data have been used in more than 130 scientific studies, yielding valuable information for scientists and land managers, such as:

- When, where, and how many eggs are laid by certain species across a wide range
- How to minimize the effects of forestry and agricultural practices on nesting birds
- Revealing that some species, such as Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds, are nesting earlier as spring temperatures have risen.

Even after five decades, there's still a lot to learn. For example, data on the Eurasian Collared-Dove, a relative newcomer to North America, remain sketchy. We still don't know how its presence affects our native Mourning Doves, or even how many times they can nest in one year. NestWatch needs more data to understand how and why species respond differently to large, continent-level changes in the environment. We need your data!

YardMap Partners With NestWatch - It's

YardMap is a citizen science project designed to cultivate a richer understanding of bird habitat, for both professional scientists and people concerned with their local environments.

YardMap is another great way of providing valuable information to scientist around the world while helping birds and enhancing your backyard habitat at the same time. You are always hearing "use native plants." Even Texas Blues includes a regular native plant feature. Now yardmap makes it easy for you to find the right plant for your yard and in turn help other homeowners know what is working in your neighborhood.

Visit <http://content.yardmap.org>, explore the special features and learn how you connect with YardMap.

Articles/photos courtesy of Cornell Labs/NestWatch

