

TEXAS Blues



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In This Issue

- 01 Prothonotary Warblers
- 04 Bluebirds Are Back!
- 05 Photo Gallery
- 06 Why We Need Insects
- 07 Plants That Attract Insects
- 08 Build It Camera Ready
- 09 Daily Peek At First Nesting
- 10 Pretty Or Plain Nestboxes
- 11 Welcome New Members
Thank You Donors
- 12 How Old Are My Babies?

Federal law protects all
native nesting birds!



Do not disturb birds or collect eggs

The Texas Bluebird Society
newsletter is published:
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Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send stories/photos to
editor@txblues.org



Managing For Prothonotary Warblers

photos and report by Dr. James Kroll

My first job after graduating Texas A&M University, with a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology, was in West Virginia. It was a paradise of vertebrate species, including an impressive array of salamanders, frogs and resident birds I had only seen in passing as they migrated northward through Texas! I became quite fond of the large number of breeding birds, particularly the warblers. To me they are among the most interesting of birds, with their diverse songs and nesting habits. A couple of years later, I returned to Texas to develop a wildlife management program at Stephen F. Austin State University, and although my main research interest was white-tailed deer, I managed to get involved in USFWS research on Golden-cheeked Warblers in Central Texas. I even traveled to the highlands of Nicaragua to locate the wintering ground of these wonderful birds.

Back home, my warbler fascination had to be satisfied with the handful of species occupying the forests of East Texas. One of my favorites became the Prothonotary Warbler, with its bright yellow plumage, black eyes and distinctive 7-10 repetition



"pete, pete" call. Loving the swamps and wetlands of eastern Texas, I soon found them in abundance in the Neches and Sabine River bottoms. Not knowing much about them, I began following them around, which often is not easy in their preferred habitat. The most interesting thing I learned that, unlike other warbler species, they are secondary cavity nesters; usually choosing those located over shallow water. The only other warbler using cavities is Lucy's Warbler, that frequents oddly enough the deserts of the Southwest! In particular, I noted they like cavities made by Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers in smaller trees periodically flooded by back waters. *(continued on page 2)*

(continued from page 1) It is not easy to follow a small bird through wetlands to eavesdrop on their daily habits, but I learned more details about their feeding habits. They search the leaves and limbs of willows, button bush, and other wetland trees and shrubs; but, they also like to explore floating logs and stumps for caterpillars, a variety of insects (terrestrial and aquatic) and snails.



Prothonotaries prefer waterfront homes

My first discovery of a nesting pair was in a snag surrounded by about two feet of water, with a cavity located much higher than I had expected, about 12 feet! It was standing in the open, with only a few snags of varying lengths. On inspecting the nest, I was struck by the fact there appeared to be nest material sticking out of the hole. Later, I learned that this is not uncommon, since the female tends to fill her nest cavity with an assortment of small twigs, leaves, moss, strips of bark and fibers. The breeding biology of Prothonotaries is fascinating in many ways. One interesting fact is the males get to the breeding areas early in April and begin competing for nest sites; placing nesting material in each one, I suppose to impress the females who arrive later! Once a nest is accepted, the female wastes no time completing her clutch of as many as 8 eggs. Incubation is quite short—12-14 days—with an even more impressive fledging time of 10-12 days! Both males and females feed the young, and there can be two clutches hatched each season.

Years later, we acquired the land for the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management & Research near Trawick, Texas. It had once been the location of the community of DalMont, named because it sat exactly halfway between Dallas and Beaumont, on a railroad spur leading to the DalMont Lumber Company mill. DalMont only existed for a few years, until the shortleaf timber in a 75-mile radius was cleared, then disappeared into the forest regrowth. The only clue that the town ever existed is the old pond, the railroad base and a tall pile of resinous sawdust that to this day still smells of pine pitch!

We reclaimed the mill pond by repairing a blown out dam, and it became a demonstration fish pond. Located near the center were two tall poles, which apparently once were part of a walkway into the pond to move floating logs. A woodpecker had excavated a cavity in one of the poles, then abandoned it. I viewed the structure as just evidence of what once had gone on there, and decided to leave the two poles in place.



Repaired blown out dam at the mill pond

To my surprise one day, I saw a Prothonotary warbler dart out of the hole! I found a place to hide along the dam, and watched to see what was going on. It turned out it was indeed a nesting pair of Prothonotary Warblers, that a few days later fledged four youngsters. The next season, the cavity was again occupied by presumably the same bird(s); *(continued next page)*

but, after that I could only catch the call of a couple of birds among the willows on the upper end of the pond.

Below the dam, there was a large area with almost flat topography that drained the small creek through a cement culvert constructed in the early 1900s for the railroad track. I got the bright idea the area would make an excellent demonstration for a constructed wetland. It only cost \$2,000 to have a steel water control box attached to the cement culvert, a small amount to spend, considering the hundreds of thousands of yards of dirt in the old railroad right-of-way.



Steel water control box resolves dam issues

The area between the control structure and the tail of the mill pond dam was choked with trees of many species, including willows, sweetgum, elms and a few oaks. Rather than cut or kill the trees, we decided to use water to create a wetland. We kept water on the area well into the summer for three years, and sure enough, the trees began to die. In their place came button bush, willows and cypress trees we planted. It became a favorite haunt for spring peepers, upland chorus frogs, leopard frogs, green and gray tree frogs, toads and bullfrogs. We have even been visited by a pair of otters.

We originally thought of wood ducks as our primary inhabitants, so we erected six nest boxes on steel posts. We used axle grease on the poles to keep

snakes and raccoons from robbing our boxes. They soon were colonized; one box producing over 50 ducklings over the years. Yet, we also decided to put some nest boxes out for smaller birds, and even kill some trees by girdling to encourage primary cavity nesters. Red-headed woodpeckers joined us, along with Downy woodpeckers. In the back of my mind, I remembered that Prothonotary males like to have lots of nests to choose from, so we put out more than we really needed. The project began 16 years ago, and today it is the most beautiful wetland you can imagine! Three years ago, I was walking along the edge, when I heard the distinctive call of a Prothonotary in one of the willows. Further investigation produced a nesting pair in one of our nestboxes. In mid-April, I was excited to hear two males calling in the wetland!

It is ironic that a place acquired and developed for deer research has developed into a haven for non-game species.



New growth wetland trees and a nestbox. Home.

Today, we have recorded 268 species of vertebrates in the center, among which are my favorites—the Prothonotary Warbler! They are losing ground each year, as habitat diminishes; yet, in a place built for white-tailed deer, they have a small foot hold!

Over the years, Dr. Kroll has received numerous awards and honors, authored many journal publications and articles, created videos, and has appeared in two leading national TV shows: North American Whitetail Television, Sportsman Channel. and Dr. Deer on Sportsman channel and Fox Sports. Visit drdeer.com.

The Bluebirds Are Back!

photos and report by Kim Roulias

Every morning my routine involves sitting on my back porch with a cup of coffee and watching the beautiful birds – as many as 20 different types at once. Of course, my favorite is the sweet little bluebirds. I have the bluebirds trained to the sound of a little song I sing especially for them, and they will come to their feeder when they see me putting out the live mealworms. I like to think I have the woodpeckers trained too, but I think it is they who have ME trained. If I don't have their special feed out by 8 am, one will start rat-a-tatting on the side of my house. Not good! One reason I adore the



woodpeckers, is because they are partially responsible for the proliferation of the bluebird in areas where people aren't putting up nest boxes. As we all know, bluebirds are "secondary cavity nesters," which mean they end up taking over cavities made by other birds like the woodpecker.

Before The Storm in mid-February – what I call "Before Storm," or "BS," I had exactly four bluebirds coming to the feeder daily: three males and one female. After the storm, now there are only the pair. I like to think it is because they are so territorial, that when the pair were ready to start making a nest, the other males flew off down to my neighbor's yard to start their own little family. Currently, in my back yard nest box, the little momma is sitting on five beautiful blue eggs, which will soon be adding to our bluebird population here at Cedar Creek Lake.

One of my favorite things is to watch the hilarious



courtship antics of the bluebirds. Recently, the little loving couple was perching in a tree, when the male flew over to the dish and picked up two fat juicy mealworms. He took them back and tried to feed them to her. He dropped one, then he rapidly flew down to retrieve it – presumably they use the "three-second rule" also, because she ate it. What's also hilarious is when she has had her fill of mealworms, and he keeps trying to feed her one, and she hops a few steps away and turns her head away like a belligerent two-year-old child, when trying to feed them spinach or another unwanted vegetable.



"I couldn't be more proud if I had laid these eggs my own self!"

In my back yard, I couldn't begin to tell you how many Pine Siskins, or Tufted Titmice, or Northern Cardinals, or Carolina Chickadees I feed on a daily basis. But the bluebirds, oh yes, I have the count! I'm sure we're all the same way. If you'd like to share how many bluebirds you have as visitors, I'd love to hear from you. Let's compare notes! Please email me at bluebird@kimroulias.com.

Photo Gallery

Such a relief to see our bluebirds after ice storm Uri!



Bluebirds like pomegranates! Larry Melamed captured mom eating s healthy lunch.



House hunting for the perfect home. Photo by Euinice Gerloff.



A little romance before starting a family. Photo by Larry Melamed.



Catherine Michele Stanley captures her first brood of the season in Weatherford.



Three days old! Photo by Angie Henry taken April 1st in Denton.



Started to build nest. Didn't see the female for about 10 days.

Suddenly nest got taller. After about another week saw a female again.

We think she is the new wife who wanted to build her own nest. Nest is dangerously high with 5 eggs. John Park, Sour Lake.

Why We Need Insects

By Linda Crum, Master Naturalist/Master Gardener



Photos by Larry Melamed

What is your first instinct when you see a cockroach? Mine is, "Kill it!" So before I make a case for why we need insects, I'll cut you some slack on cockroaches if you step on one. Yes, we need insects. Insects play an important role in decomposing animals and plants. Things would be a little messy without our insect friends to get rid of the decaying material.

The total mass of insects far exceeds that of vertebrates. Not only do insects pollinate crops and flowers, they provide food for many species, including humans. Yes, there are humans that eat cockroaches. Most reptiles and amphibians would disappear without insects. Half of the bird population would also disappear.

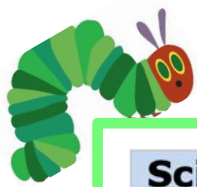
Most songbird babies are fed exclusively insects. Bluebirds feed their young caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers or any other catchable insect. Chickadees are a little pickier. They feed their young only caterpillars. And according to Doug Tallamy's research, it takes between 6,000 and 9,000 caterpillars to feed one clutch of chickadees.

Years ago when I first became a master gardener, I had never used any pesticides. But these A&M professors gave us a lecture about controlling insects.

If you have aphids, spray with X. If you have scale, spray with Y. So I began my better gardening through chemistry. After a while I noticed that I had no more anoles, lady beetles or bees in my yard. I realized my error in trying to control nature and put the chemicals away. In fact, I went totally organic. It took about 3 years for my garden to get back into balance. During that time, I got rid of all my lawn and replaced it with flowers that attracted pollinators.

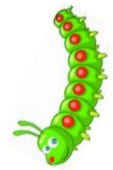
Last year, sod webworms were all the rage. I don't have a lawn, but there is one on the easement behind my house. I mow that easement since the MUD district will only mow 4 times a year. While mowing, I noticed moths flying out of the grass. But I watched carefully as the bluebirds would fly down into the grass and pick up caterpillars – sod webworms. I never sprayed and never noticed damage to the grass.

Most insects are classified as beneficial or at least not pests. Only about 3% of insects are considered pests. A lot of those beneficial insects keep the pest insects in check. Birds also keep insects in check. Keep that in mind when you are tempted to pull out the chemical to kill the insects. You are killing some baby bird's breakfast.

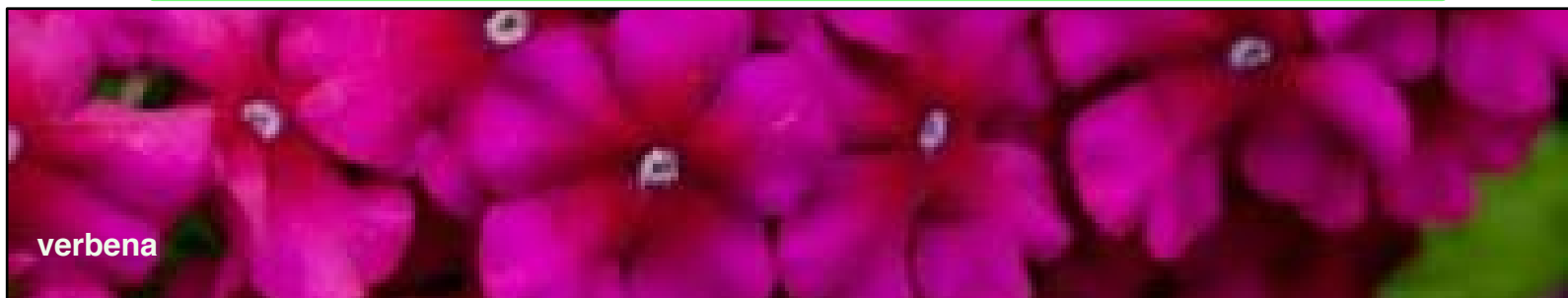


Plants That Attract Insects (Food) For Bluebirds

A = Annual; P = Perennial; B = Biennial
© Texas Bluebird Society



Scientific Name	Common Name**
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	yarrow (P)
<i>Allium</i> sp.	wild onions (P)
<i>Asclepias</i> spp.	milkweeds (P)
<i>Castilleja</i> spp.	paintbrushes (P)
<i>Centaurea americana</i>	American basket-flower (A)
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	buttonbush (P)
<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	partridge pea (A)
<i>Chilopsis linearis</i>	desert willow (P)
<i>Conoclinium</i> spp.	mistflowers, wild ageratum (P)
<i>Dalea</i> sp.	prairie clovers (P)
<i>Echinacea</i> spp.	purple coneflowers (P)
<i>Eryngium</i> spp.	rattlesnake master, eryngo (P)
<i>Helianthus</i> spp.	sunflowers (A & P)
<i>Ilex decidua</i>	possumhaw holly (P)
<i>Lantana urticoides</i>	Texas lantana (P)
<i>Liatris</i> spp.	gayfeather, blazing star (P)
<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>	coral honeysuckle (P)
<i>Malvaviscus arboreus</i> var. <i>drummondii</i>	turk's cap (P)
<i>Marshallia caespitosa</i>	Barbara's buttons (P)
<i>Melampodium leucanthum</i>	blackfoot daisy (P)
<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	passion vine (P)
<i>Polytaenia nuttallii</i>	prairie parsley (B)
<i>Pontederia cordata</i>	pickerelweed (P)
<i>Prunus</i> spp.	cherry, peach, plum, cherry laurel (P)
<i>Pyrus</i> NOT NATIVE	pear (P)
<i>Rosa</i> FEW ARE NATIVE	scented old roses, wild roses (P)
<i>Salvia farinacea</i>	mealy blue sage (P)
<i>Solidago</i> & <i>Oligoneuron</i> spp.	goldenrods (P)
<i>Symphotrichum</i> spp.	asters (P)
<i>Verbena</i> spp.	verbena (P)
<i>Verbesina</i> spp.	frostweed, crownbeard (P)
<i>Vernonia</i> spp.	ironweeds (P)



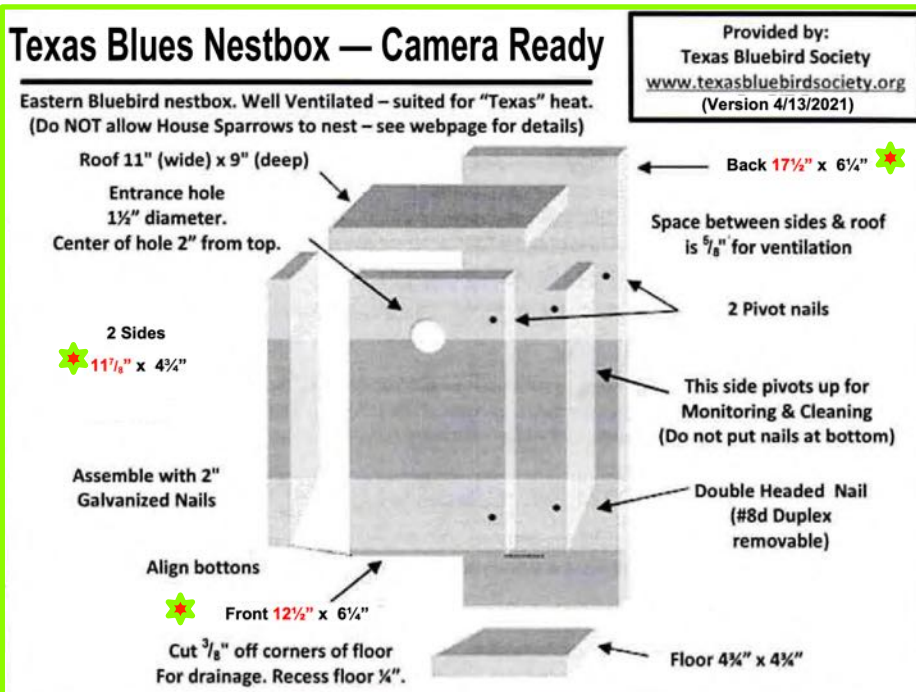
verbena



Make Your Own Camera Ready Nestbox

Intrigued by **Larry Melamed's** article in the March issue of *TX Blues*? Have you been watching the great videos Larry is posting on TBS Facebook page? Now you can build your own camera ready nestbox! **Shannon Ramsey**, one of the TBS Certified Nestbox Builders, has worked with Larry to create a design for modifying a TBS nestbox to make it camera ready.

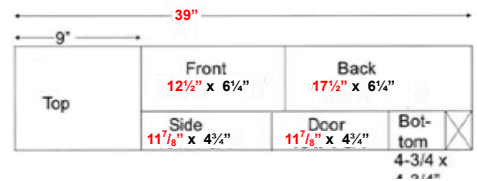
Shannon has highlighted the changes you need to make in **RED** on the TBS nestbox plans.



Shannon provides the new layout measurements to create one nestbox from a 1 x 12 x 39 inch cedar board.

Cutting out one TB-1 nestbox

- Each 1x12 by 39 inch cedar will make 1 nestbox
- Cutting plan:
 - Cut top
 - Then rip remaining in two pieces (6-1/4" & 4-3/4")



Tools: Hammer, Table Saw, Drill, a 1½" Hole Saw or Forstner Drill Bit (Forstner Bit will cut a more smooth and accurate hole) and a 5/32" drill bit for the Double Headed Nail hole.

Materials: Lumber: 39" of 1x12" (actual dimensions ¾" x 11"). (White Pine and Cedar are the most durable & workable, but other wood can be used as long as it is NOT chemically treated to repel insects or resist decay).

Fasteners: 14 – 2" galvanized nails (or 1-½" wood screws if preferred).
1 – #8 Duplex Double Headed Nail to keep door closed.

Directions:

- Cut a 9" long piece of 1x12 (roof).
- Rip with the table saw the remaining 1x12 into pieces with widths of 4¾" and 6¼".
- Cut the 4¾ wide piece into the following lengths: 2 – 11⅞" (for sides), and 1 – 4¾" (for bottom).
- Cut the 6¼ wide piece into the following lengths: 1 – 17½" (for back), and 1 – 12½" (for front).
- Drill the 1½" diameter entrance hole in the front piece with the center of the hole 2" from the top edge.
- Attach the non-pivoting side piece to the back so that its top edge is 2¼" from the top edge of the back.
- Attach the pivoting side piece to the back with a nail at the top only (pivot nail).
- Attach the front piece, with the bottom edge aligned with the bottom edge of the side pieces. Attach nails at the top only of the pivoting side.
- Cut 3/8" off the corners of the floor for drainage and attach the floor, recessing it into the box ¼".
- Attach the flat roof 1¼" down from the top edge of the back piece. The roof will be attached to the back and front only. The sides are 5/8" shorter, providing a gap for ventilation. The roof will extend out approximately 3" in front and 2" on each of the sides for rain protection.
- Attach appropriate mounting hardware. (It is recommended that the box is NOT mounted to a Tree or Wooden Fence that would allow a predator easy access.)

Now that you have completed the nestbox you are ready to install your camera.

Review Larry Melamed's article on pages 6 and 7 of the March issue of *TX Blues*. Larry includes his personal recommendations on purchasing and installing your camera equipment.

Now, one more task; share your videos on [TBS Facebook page!](#)

First Nesting of 2021

By Larry Melamed: Complete success! See daily progress from 5 eggs to fledglings

One egg a day was laid 3/14 thru 3/18.



Mama began incubating the eggs on 3/18. The eggs all hatched on 4/1.



The babies pretty much just sleep and eat the first 5 days. Contour feathers start to develop on 4/2. Feather sheaths begin to emerge on wings on 4/4. Wings are darker. Eyes are still closed.



Mama stopped brooding after 4/7 since the babies can now maintain their body temperature. First feathers burst from tip of sheaths. Eyes opened on 4/9.



Wing feathers begin to emerge. Can begin to see blue on the males around 4/15.



They began jumping around and flapping their wings on 4/17. First baby fledged on 4/19.



The remaining 4 all fledged on 4/21.

I will be posting many videos of this nesting on my website at <https://www.larrymelamed.com/videos> and my YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr8KqwKJT1v9Cyi2-fC2umA>. Subscribe to my YouTube to be notified as new videos are added.

Pretty or Plain -



©Pamela Kennedy/In X Designs

Dear TBS,

Thank you for your wonderful, easy to follow bluebird house plans. This is my first woodworking endeavor and I think it turned out quite nicely. I will be making many more bluebird houses to give away as gifts. It satisfies my creative desire to build something from scratch and then my creative talents for painting.

Pamela Kennedy, Graphic Designer
In X Designs

Inspired by Pamela's beautiful nestbox?

Build your own nestbox using TBS [building plans](http://txblues.org) at txblues.org



Buy a certified built Texas-style nestbox from a Nestbox Distributer near you. Then, express yourself!



*Bluebirds Love TBS Nestboxes!

* and other cavity nesters!

Nestbox Distributors

<u>City</u>	<u>Distributor</u>
Aubrey	James and Sharon Higgins
Buda	Ron and Pauline Tom
Canton Area	Lisa Mabry
Fisher	Jeri Porter
Georgetown	Tonja Hamel
Grapeland	Jim Renfro
Hemphill	Marsha Moon
Hunt	Vicki Van Pelt
Ivanhoe	Harold Latham
Keller	Barb Ohlman
Kountz	Randy Been
Liberty	Charles Post
McKinney	Paul Nelson
Medina	Carol Hagemeyer
Mt. Pleasant	Keith Kridler
Trinity	Lonnie and Letitia Castleman
Tyler	Ann Fox
Woodlands	Linda Crum
Montgomery	Archie Manning
Montgomery	Dee Myers
Washington	Barbara Boucher
Utopia	LeAnn Sharp
Wortham	Tracie Cromwell

Contact information and map to each distributor is online. TBS website, [Nestbox Distributor tab](#)

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Contact Us:
tbs@txblues.org
936-439-7114 (Lonnie Castleman)



Welcome New Members

- Ken/Grace Aggen
- Cynthia Akeroyd
- Dan/Myra Anderson
- Kay Anderson
- Veronica Bader
- Margaret Barker
- Susie Bernard
- Polina Boston
- Lisa Bruce
- Heather Bullock
- Ronny Carroll
- Shirley Carter
- Kristina Casanova
- Uphie V. Chaney
- Cole Farm LLC
- Dina Czar
- Vic & Dee Dacey
- Kathleen Daly
- Susan Dean
- Cathy Downs
- Kim Doyle
- Lynda Duffy
- Shannon Fallentine
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- Angela Goodwin
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- James Greer
- Jim/Johnny Heidelberg
- Angela Henry
- Greg/Eileen Herbeck
- Jack Hooper
- Jon Hranicky
- Cheryl Hunker
- Julie Hunt
- Donna Israel
- Ellen Jobe
- Greg/ane Jordan
- Christine Kelly
- Lori Kocurek Zalesak
- Cheryl LeJune
- Jenna Little
- Marlene Madincea
- Genice Mancini
- Tom/Sallye Markel
- Jean Marsh
- Susan Mitlyng
- David Morgan
- Patsy Mosby
- Gene Muldrow
- Native Praries Assn of TX
- Brit Nelson
- Vicki Nichols
- Kristina Niewald
- Jaime Noles
- Jamie Nutt
- Susan Nye
- Mary Lou Ohlrich
- Cynthia Parish
- Charlie Patrick
- Jessica Patrick
- Carol Patterson
- Kevin Paulson
- Judy Pugh
- Robb Ramos
- Pamela Roberson
- Jeff/Jackie Rohling
- Cathy Rudzinski
- Teddie Ryan
- Nellwyn Sadler
- Cecilia Samish
- Lynn Sawyer
- Brent Schwartz
- Lyane Scoskie
- Holly Simonette
- Barbara Smith
- John Michael Solar
- Betty Starns
- Shannon Summerlin
- Mark & Lisa Susich
- Karen A. Taylor
- Sherrie Teller
- TX Wildlife Assn
- Hill Country River Region
- Veronica Walther
- Nicole Ward
- Jane Warzon
- Helen Wenzel
- Holly Wilcox
- Mike/Vera Wilhite
- Mike/Linda Williams
- Louis Williams
- Juliet & Craig Williams
- Geneve Wind
- Paul J. Zohlen

Your donation buys the materials to build our home

Bill Bartush
A. Best
Bert Blanchard
Anne Cassidy
Patricia Coyle
Sondra Creighton
Bradley Culter
Kathleen Daly
Scott Darnell
Janna Dieringer
Kay Fancher
Anna M Goodman

Thank
You!

Sally Goss
Terry/Melinda Johnson
R.L. Langley
Mike Mullins
Barbara
OhlmanKatherine Peake



Marvin & Trudlise Rathke
Cynthia and Mark Richison
Mary Lou Rizzo
Robert Rowland
San Antonio Audubon
Lynn Sawyer
Roy Smalley
Janet Stockard
David & Edwina Thomas
Phyllis & Ben Tobias
Robert Veach

Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

Volunteers Needed

Do you like to travel the backroads of Texas? Meet interesting people? Help the bluebirds (and other cavity-nesting birds) of Texas?

Texas Bluebird Society is in need of volunteers to:

- ▶ Transport lumber from sawmill to nestbox builders throughout the state
- ▶ Transport nestboxes from builders to distributors and/or storage
- ▶ Help with setup/break down of booth at festivals and events

Do you prefer to work from the comfort of your own home? We also need a volunteer coordinator, a person responsible for various aspects regarding all volunteers.

Please contact **Lonnie Castleman** at president@txblues.org for more details.



It doesn't get any sadder than this!
I found half a dozen bluebirds in a nest box yesterday where they froze to death. My poor babies.

Zero nesting started in my other boxes so far. As a lifetime member of the Texas Bluebird Society, I'll work extra hard this year building numbers back by providing food (pesticide free insects and berries in the landscape), water (bird baths, ponds, and streams), and shelter (trees, shrubs, woods, dead snags, and nest boxes). For more information on bluebirds visit txblues.org

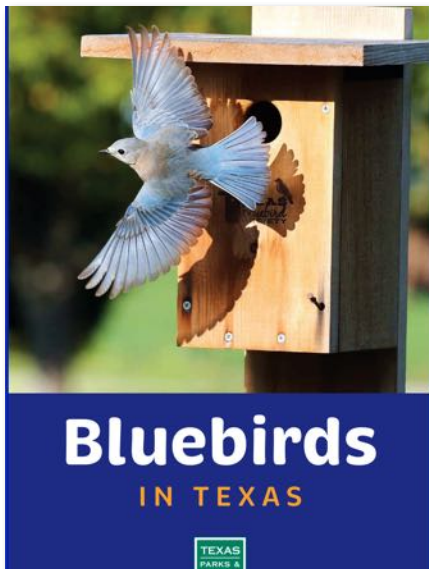
Winter wildlife deaths can be reported here:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/.../winter-storm-uri-wildlife...>

Greg Grant
Greg Grant Gardens

Do You Have Questions?

Find the answers in TPWD [Bluebirds In Texas](#) handbook. Edited by TBS, the best source for information specific to Texas. Download from TBS website (booklet.txblues.org)



Missed the day they hatched? Use this photo series to estimate the age of your nestlings. Developmental chart is on page 28.