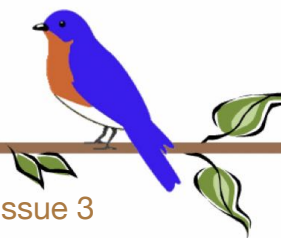


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter • July 2021 • Volume 20.Issue 3

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Federal law protects all native nesting birds!



Do not disturb birds or collect eggs

The Texas Bluebird Society newsletter is published March - May - July - October
Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send stories/photos to
editor@txblues.org



We're Back! TBS Booth At Festivals Again

report by Ron Tom

We all hear the term "The New Normal." But the past year and a half has severely limited getting new Texas Bluebird Society members through our presence at festivals. Through the years we have received some new members from speaking engagements and presentations. Historically, larger festivals have produced the bulk of our new memberships.



Ken & Judy Ray, Bill & Sharon Vick, and Ann Fox volunteer at Wine Festival.



Pauline & Ron Tom walked 1/2 mile to see the iconic Tomato Festival mascot.



Harold Latham & Sharon Vick welcome new member.

The Jacksonville Tomato Festival and the earlier Lindale Wine Fest have greatly helped TBS for 2021. As COVID restrictions lessen, people are getting out and attending festivals. The Tomato Festival was a great opportunity to recruit volunteers, set up a booth, and seek new members to TBS to join our "army" of volunteers with at least one installed nestbox.

On June 12 TBS volunteers :Harold Latham, Pauline Tom, Sharon Vick, Bill Vick, Ann Fox, Deborah Tugwell, and myself, manned the TBS booth at the Tomato Festival. Over 50 attendees joined TBS to help provide habitat for bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds.

Interacting with the public and discussing and sharing bluebird information was a thrill festival booth volunteers missed during the COVID interim. My enjoyment high at the Tomato Festival came from meeting a young girl who had just won the tomato eating contest for her age group as her mom stopped at our booth. I do not know if she was smiling so much from winning the tomato eating contest or because she learned so much about bluebirds. I think it was about bluebirds. Her mom obtained a membership!



Deborah Tugwell assists another new member.



Do you know of a festival TBS should consider? Contact Roberta Marshall, roberta@txblues.org.



Thanks to Ron Tom for sharing his photos!

Are you willing to help at a TBS festival booth? Watch the newsletter, website, and Facebook for upcoming festivals. And, send an email to records@txblues.org to ensure "festival booth" is marked in your volunteer interest in your membership record.

EFFECT OF ICE STORM URI ON EASTERN BLUEBIRDS IN TEXAS

reported by Pauline Tom



“We sure miss our bluebirds. The freeze took them all.” Larry Williamson’s comment on Texas Bluebird Society’s Facebook in mid-June was followed by statement from Larry Melamad, “I had several before the freeze. Just one pair now. They’re on their third brood.”

In April, Sherry Ramsey in Magnolia wrote, “I sure don’t understand why we have no bluebirds. ... Since the snow storm they have been gone.” A few weeks later, in May, Sherry exclaimed, “I finally have a nest and eggs in my bluebird house.”

Winter Storm Uri in mid-February certainly disrupted bluebird nesting in Texas and bluebird sightings declined.

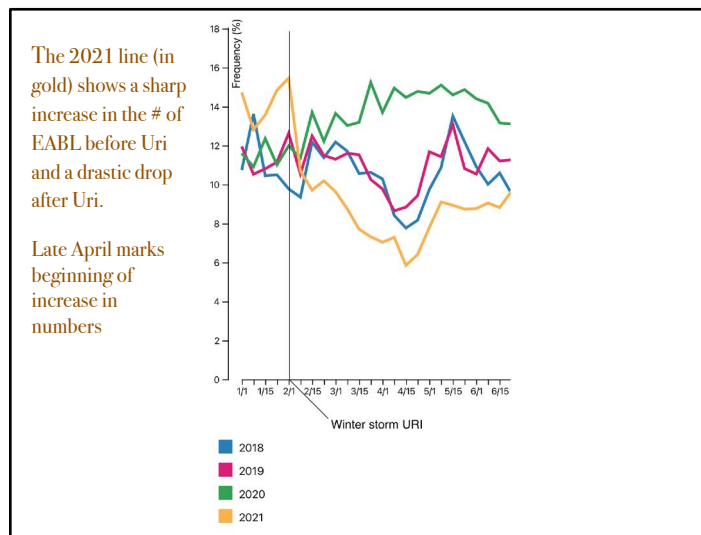
eBird, a website/app through which individuals report bird sightings to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, recorded only 7,064 reports of Eastern Bluebird sightings in Texas in March 2021 compared to over 10,000 in March 2019 and March 2020. The 25% - 30% decrease in sightings does not equate to that many dead bluebirds, although we know many perished* and we’re still hearing fatality reports. Most recently, at our booth at Tomato Festival, an individual told of dozens of dead bluebirds discovered in a single nestbox.

eBird line graphs showing frequency and abundance in Texas of Eastern Bluebird reports in January – May, 2018 – 2021, show numbers starting a decrease in early February with a sharp decline in mid-February.

Dr. Patricia A. Gowaty told how the bluebirds in Athens GA temporarily migrated south before a severe winter storm several years ago. TPWD biologist Clifford Shackelford explained how the situation was different in Texas.

"Flying south" wouldn't work if wintering in the eastern third of Texas because that means running out of dry land rather quickly. And after reaching the Gulf shoreline, one would have to continue west/southwest in order to reach the South Texas Brushlands yet Uri extended throughout that ecoregion all the way to the Rio Grande (and beyond). ... Also, the below-freezing temps of Uri lasted 5 or 6 days across most of Texas plus materialized so quickly.

The lines on graphs showing Texas Eastern Bluebird frequency and abundance hit the lowest 2021 point on April 15 (lower than any point in January – May 2018, 2019, and 2020). After that point, eBird’s Eastern Bluebird line graphs show a gradual, steady climb.



eBird maps of Eastern Bluebird sightings still show many vicinities in Texas with no reports since Uri. But, the distances between points are closing in as more and more Texans see and report bluebirds.

There’s every reason to believe Eastern Bluebird nestings and quantities will continue to increase in 2021 and beyond.

It’s more important than ever to report avian nestings to NestWatch. (There’s an app for that!) Through our reports, scientists will see what happens with avian nestings after such a major climatic event.

Keep in mind, even with Uri’s strong impact, there were no regional extirpations. And, according to 40+ years of Breeding Bird surveys, Eastern Bluebirds increased +174 % so even if thousands died in Uri, the bluebird population is strong.

Certainly numbers in Texas decreased in 2021. An increase in the quantity of nestboxes spread across Texas will help bluebirds rebound.

It is not too late to report Uri fatalities if you find mummified bluebirds in forgotten nestboxes. Report all wildlife fatalities to [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org).

IT'S HOT OUT HERE!

Sialis.org provides facts and suggestions on helping our bluebirds survive high temperature.

Temperatures: According to [Cornell](#), the optimal range for bird egg development is 96.8 °F to 104.9 °F (36 °C to 40.5 °C). Higher temperatures can be lethal for the embryo. (Birdscope, Summer 2002, Vol.16 No.3, Cooper and Chu). Bluebird eggs and nestlings cannot survive temperatures exceeding 107 °F (41° C) ([Conley Black](#)). Prolonged excessive heat can severely impact nestling health due to dehydration and heat stress.

Temperatures inside a nestbox can reach 120 °F, and are often at least 10 degrees higher than the outside temperature ([Cudsworth et al](#)). Some research indicates that if temperatures outside are 100-104 °F, the percentage of eggs that hatch drop, and nestlings under nine days old can die from heat stress or dehydration. (Up to 6-9 days old, the nestlings are as sensitive as eggs to cold/heat.) Use a high/low thermometer during full sun in your nestboxes to see if they hit 107 °F.

TEMPERATURE LOWERING TIPS FOR YOUR NESTBOX

Location: Place nestboxes where they will be shaded in the afternoon, but far enough away from large branches to avoid climbing predators.

Nestbox Style: Plenty of ventilation space with an overhanging roof on the front and sides allows the air to circulate and offers some protection from the sun. See TBS nestbox plans.

According to Keith Kridler, a dark colored nestbox (flat finish paint) can be 18 °F hotter than an identical white colored nestbox. Never paint boxes in a hot climate a dark color. Painting the exterior of the box white or light tan (before nesting season begins) can help reduce interior temperature. Look for high Light Reflective Value (LRV%).



Heat Shield: Check out David Shiels' experiment with heat shields - interior temperatures were as much as 6.3°F lower than outside temperatures. Experiment summary available in *TX Blues*, 2003 issue 1. Heat shield plans available at txblues.org. See how TBS nestboxes measure up in new heat study review in *TX Blues* 2011 issue 4. Heat Shields reduce temperature by creating a Venturi effect. Spacing is critical, material can be plastic, plywood, or corrugated cardboard (used for political signs).

A New Twist On Heat Shields: Shelly Harris from Oklahoma has been working on heat shielding of bluebird nestboxes that are not in shade. She found window screening sold at Home Depot reduces heat from the sun's rays by 90%. All you need to do to see the effectiveness of the screens is to stand directly in the hot sun for a minute. Then put the screen up over your face about 5" away from your face and you can immediately feel a reduction in heat. Details and photos available at sialis.org.



Other Methods: Attach an umbrella to the shade the nestbox. Add a second roof for extra insulation.



From Larry Melamed: After walking out every afternoon for a week when it was close to 100 to strap frozen water bottles to the nest box (which was already under a beach umbrella) I decided to test another modification to the nestbox. Besides raising the roof a little for ventilation I'm going to install a small CPU fan in the top of the box to circulate the air better. The solar powered batteries I use can power 2 devices so it'll power the fan in addition to the camera. Hopefully it makes a difference. My boxes got up to 104.9. The frozen water bottles made a 3 degree difference. Larry will share his results in the next issue of *TX Blues*.



It is not uncommon for a pair of bluebirds to successfully raise four complete families in a single season, but two to three broods a year is normal in Texas. This means bluebirds are trying to raise their families in the very hot summer months. Do what you can to keep them cool!

Photo by Linda Crum.

Who Is Ready For Dinner?

Mom and Dad provide food while fledglings are taught life skills



*And this is how you catch a worm!
Photo by Mike Carmo, Lebanon County, PA*



*Now remember, mealworms are for snacks, not dinner. You need insects, fruit and berries to stay healthy and strong.
Photo by Albert Wiersch*



*Berries sustain bluebirds when insects are in limited supply.
Billy Budi - Wilbirds Unlimited Backyard Photos, Cypress.*



*And that's our lesson for today.
Photo by David Kineer*



Always provide a water source. Lynett Dobbins has a drip set up at her home in Walker County.



Soon you will know how to find your own dinner. Photo by Boyd's Birds.



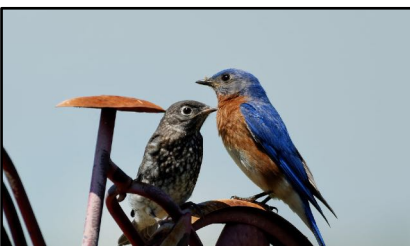
*Hey! Who ate the last mealworm?
Photo by Boyd's Birds.*



Final got one! Photo by Larry Melamed



*Love those mealworms!
Photo by Angie Henry,*



*Thanks for everything Dad!
Photo by Larry Melamed.*

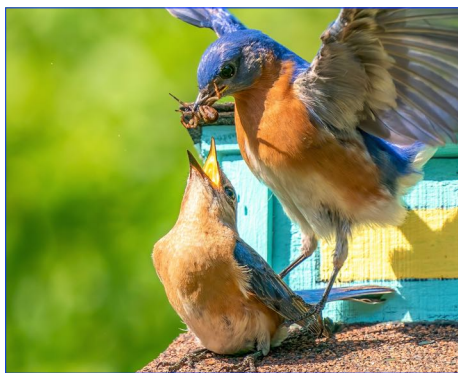


More great photos and action packed bluebird videos on TBS facebook

Photo Gallery



Photo by David Kinneer



My favorite! Photo by Alex White



Photo by Sam Toscano



*Tell me again why I leave?
Photo by Lorna Fulks*



*How long do we have to wait?
Photo by Beth James Sinclair*



*Keep the grass short please.
Easier for me to see dinner. Photo
by David Kinneer*

Water to drink - water to bathe - water to just keep cool!

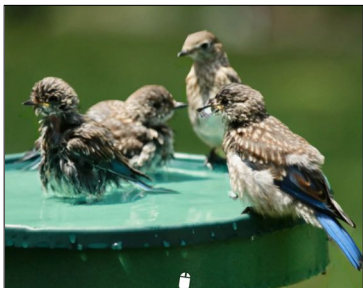


Photo by Robin Sansoucie



Photo by David Kinneer

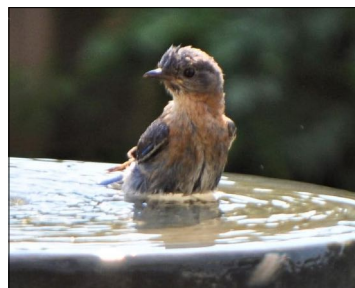


Photo by Angie Henry



Photo by Luke Hoag



Eastern Bluebird eggs are usually blue. I found these today which are white. This means she is lacking the pigment that dyes them as they go thru her chamber to be laid. Her eggs will always be white. LeAnn Garrison-Sharp Hill Country Nature Center Utopia



On average, parents feed their young 2 times per hour. Sometimes young from prior broods help!

Photo by Deanne Korte

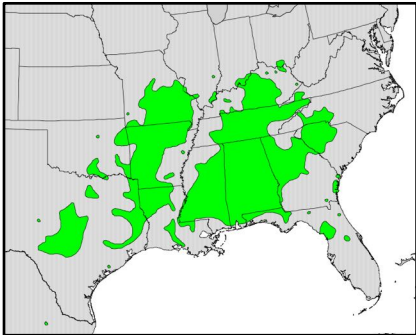


However, color of the egg has no effect on how hungry they are!

Carolina buckthorn, *Frangula caroliniana*

By Linda Crum, Master Naturalist/Master Gardener

Carolina buckthorn is a native, deciduous shrub or small tree producing berries that are very attractive to birds and other wildlife. It is the larval host plant for the snout butterfly. Discovered in South Carolina gives the plant the common and Latin names. Despite the common name, buckthorn, this plant has no thorns. Its flowers appear in May and June and are rather unremarkable, small yellow-green flowers that attract many pollinators. Red berries follow the flowers, ripening to black in September.



Green indicates areas where shrub is native

Carolina buckthorn's native range includes bottomlands, streams and ravines in the Edwards Plateau and East Texas. Growing as an understory small tree, part shade is the preferred light requirement along with moist, well-drained soil in East Texas. In the Edwards Plateau, the plant receives more sunlight and produces dense shrubby growth.

The leaves of Carolina buckthorn are elliptical, dark green and glossy. Leaves retain their dark glossy appearance late into fall before turning a yellow-green color and dropping from the plant. Some of the leaves will hang on through February.

There are no disease or insect problems with Carolina buckthorn but it is not deer-resistant. Propagation is by ripe seed or semi-hardwood cuttings taken in late summer. Stratify seed 30-60 days at 41 degrees before planting.

Find a place in your landscape to add Carolina buckthorn.



Berries provide food attracting birds and other pollinators. Photo by Dorothy Thetford.



Small green yellow flowers appear in May and June. Photo by Mason Brock.



Carolina Buckthorn has great fall foliage. Photo by Joseph A. Marcus.

Carolina Buckthorn Is Larval Host Plant

The Carolina buckthorn is also a larval host for the American Snout butterfly. The leaf green caterpillar is about one inch long when mature.

The long-nosed butterfly with mottled black, orange and white coloration, migrates randomly around Central and South Texas following late summer rains, said Texas Entomologist Mike Quinn. "It's not a migration in the usual terms," Quinn said. "They're 'emigrating' out of where they overpopulated and exhausted the food source, looking for new mates."



Photo:dallasbutterflies.com



Photo by Tom Reynolds

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

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Ann Fox

Jon Hranicky

Robert Johnston

Harold Latham

Dee Myers

John Park

Judy Ray

Ken Ray

Pauline Tom

Ron Tom

Susie Vick

Bill Vick



Welcome New Members

- Marilyn Anderson
- John Barrington
- Bruce Bebow
- Sherry & Kerry Briggs
- Becky Brunson
- Susan & Jack Callicutt
- Robbye Chasteen
- William Christensen
- Megan Coit
- Debra Cole
- Mark de Kiewiet
- Chris & Jim Dyess
- Mary Edward
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- Lisa Thames
- Janis Theophanes
- J. Dan Toney
- Joan Towers
- Jan Vandivort
- Craig Wagner
- Patricia Walsh
- Roy & Debra Windsor



What happened To All Of My New Friends?

50 new members joined TBS at the Tomato Festival!

Volunteers, following procedure, sent membership forms to our post office box in Spring. *Nothing is delivered!* The package was tracked and verified it was received on June 21st at the Spring Post Office—but, no one can find it.

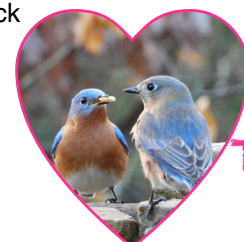
We need your help! If you know anyone who joined at the Tomato Festival, please contact Linda at txorganicgardener@gmail.com Appreciate your help!

Your donation buys the materials to build our home

Richard & Sally Arnett
Bruce Bebow
Mary Blevins
Bill Carter
Elisabeth Castro
Charles Coffey
Rennie & Cheryl Dover
Colleen Eckert
Sue Franks
Marilyn Gaylord
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James Rieman
Jessie & Denise Seals

Jo Spindle
Michael Szymanski
Suzette Szymanski
Lisa Thames
The Blackbaud Giving Fund



Thank You!



20th Anniversary!

Share photos - memories - stories - anecdotes - thoughts - and wishes

in the Oct issue of TX Blues.

*send to editor@txblues.org
by September 15th.*

FIRST Official TBS Bluebird Trail

A new bluebird project began in January at the Hornsby Bend Biosolids Treatment Facility in Austin. The multi-phased project will be headed by TBS in cooperation with Travis Audubon and the Center for Environmental Research.

FIRST Official Boyscout Project

Kaufman's Boy Scout Troop 332 Assists Texas Bluebird Society and Texas Parks and Wildlife in building a Bluebird Trail

On the weekend of December 15th, 2001 Kaufman's Boy Scout Troop 332 erected 21 bluebird boxes at the new Lake Tawakoni State Park near Wills Point, Texas. Troop Leader is TBS member David Shiels.



President's Corner – by Pauline Tom

Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time
What a great motto! It was created as the new Texas Bluebird Society board members brainstormed around a picnic table under oak trees in my backyard in October. The phrase clearly expresses what this North American Bluebird Society affiliate is working towards and how we will accomplish the task.

Between the phrases is the unspoken key – people. People who care about effective

Try something new in 2002 to be more effective! Tried and true (by a successful few) “beat the heat” Texas techniques include adding a second or larger roof, drastically increasing ventilation, and placing nestboxes in shade of a large tree. Another trick is painting or stapling black circles on each side of a nestbox to increase chance that birds will be attracted to a “hole”. Think beyond what has been written about bluebirds by those with experience in other states. Think outside the box.



**First Message from the
First President Pauline Tom in
First TBS newsletter 2/2002
First Editor Mark Klym**