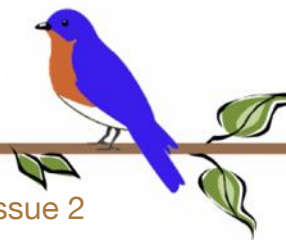


TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter • May 2022 • Volume 21.Issue 2

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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



Be A Good Bluebird Landlord

"People who are willing to spend the money or take the time to build good nestboxes, install mounting poles with guards, and then take the time to monitor and learn more about the lives of these birds are **Extra Special** human beings."

—Keith Kridler, TBS Co-Founder



Built by TBS Certified Nestbox Builders.

Use A Texas Style Nestbox

Start with a nestbox designed to meet the demands of the Texas environment.

TBS nestbox features include ventilation slots, smooth 1-1/2 inch entrance hole, overhanging roof, mounting hardware for House Sparrow trap, and easily accessible side panel opening for viewing and monitoring. Nestboxes can be purchased from any [Nestbox Distributor](#), or build your own using [TBS nestbox building plans](#).

Find The Right Location

The most important factor in attracting nesting bluebirds is to set up your nestbox up in a proper habitat. Consider the following in determining your site selection.

- Nest primarily in suburban and rural areas. Love golf courses, cemeteries, parks, and gardens.
- Sunny openings with nearby trees without bushy areas and with short cropped grass.
- Never mount on a tree, fence or fencepost.
- Mount the nestbox *near* a convenient perch (fence, tree limb, low object) to receive youngsters on their first flight from the nestbox.
- Afternoon shade is crucial as summer progresses.

Visit txblues.org for additional guidance on choosing a nestbox location.

Nestbox [installation](#) instructions including suggested predator guards are available.

For more tips and tricks on how to be a good bluebird landlord, go to page 6.

Does Supplemental Feeding Help Nesting Birds?

by Robyn Bailey, NestWatch Project Leader



Photo © Deb Winters

Wild bird feeding is one of North America's largest undirected ornithological "experiments," one in which many of us willingly participate because it is a simple way to nurture our backyard birds. In the United States, more than 59 million people feed birds around the home (U.S. Department of the Interior et al. 2018). Beginning in 2014, NestWatch organized one of the largest studies of supplemental feeding of breeding birds, simply by asking participants to report whether or not they offered supplemental food to nesting bluebirds and chickadees (all species). After delving into the data collected from 2014–2019, we were able to analyze 24,528 nest records of Eastern Bluebirds, Black-capped Chickadees, and Carolina Chickadees submitted by citizen scientists from Alaska to Florida. We sought to answer the question of how feeding wild birds impacts their reproductive success on this grand scale.

In this recently published study (Bailey and Bonter 2021), Eastern Bluebirds were considered supplemented if they were offered insect larvae (e.g., mealworms or waxworms), whereas the chickadees were considered supplemented if they were provided seeds, suet, insect larvae, or fruit. NestWatchers also reported when they made food available (i.e., before eggs were laid, when eggs were present, and/or when nestlings were present) so that we could determine if a nest was supplemented during the relevant time period.

TIMING OF EGG-LAYING

Our analysis revealed that Eastern Bluebirds with access to additional food laid eggs nearly 6 days earlier than those without; however, chickadees did not lay eggs any earlier when they were offered food. Laying eggs earlier could be an advantage for bluebirds if it allows them to produce an additional clutch later in the season. However, there is a risk that they could nest too early and encounter

lethally cold weather in the early spring (Pinkowski 1977). We are not sure why chickadees didn't nest any earlier when food was available, but it's possible that they rely on other cues to decide when to lay eggs.

CLUTCH SIZE

Eastern Bluebirds and both species of chickadees held steady in their clutch size, even with additional food on offer. Other factors were more strongly correlated with clutch size, such as latitude, longitude, and how late in the breeding season the eggs were laid. For example, Black-capped Chickadee clutch sizes increased from south to north, whereas Eastern Bluebird clutch sizes decreased. Both Carolina Chickadees and Eastern Bluebirds increased their clutch sizes from east to west. Our three focal species tended to lay smaller clutches later in the season. For Eastern Bluebirds with access to extra food, there was a small increase in clutch size for those late clutches, suggesting that supplementation can reduce this downward trend in clutch size as the season progresses. However, because both chickadee species rarely lay a second clutch, they essentially put all of their eggs in one basket.



Mealworms On The Menu

Mealworms are increasingly fed to bluebirds and other species, but some argue that the extra food might be "too much of a good thing." Photo © Larry Keller

NEST SURVIVAL

This analysis took into account the presence or absence of predator guards, which are correlated with **increased nest survival** (Bailey and Bonter 2017). For an average Eastern Bluebird nest with a predator guard, nest survival was improved by about 5% overall when food was available. Our results suggested that for nests which make it to the nestling period, feeding bluebirds may be particularly helpful in the earlier part of the breeding season, when nestlings may be vulnerable to early spring cool weather. Nevertheless, unsupplemented Eastern Bluebirds still had very high nest success, suggesting that they survive quite well in nest boxes with predator guards even without human-provided food. Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees, on the other hand, did not have higher nest survival when supplemental food was available. This suggests that other factors (e.g., predators, competitors) may impact chickadee nest survival more than food availability.

NESTLING MASS

Because NestWatchers are not able to handle nestlings without special permits, we also undertook a concurrent study in Tompkins County, New York, to investigate whether supplemental feeding of 10 g of mealworms per nest per day increased nestling mass of Eastern Bluebirds and Black-capped Chickadees (Dzielski et al. 2021). This was a smaller study involving just two years of data, but the results were nevertheless consistent with the findings from the national study.

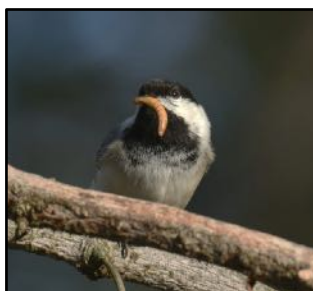
From the smaller study in upstate New York, we found that Eastern Bluebirds produced nestlings which were 5.2% heavier as they approached fledging age when given extra food. Previous research on songbirds suggests that first year survival is better for relatively heavy fledglings than for lean fledglings, suggesting that bluebird nestlings with access to supplemental food may

have better prospects in life. Black-capped Chickadees, once again, did not benefit even though we provided live mealworms at nest boxes. We were unable to investigate Carolina Chickadees because they do not nest in upstate New York.

LESSONS LEARNED

Bluebirds and chickadees are among the most likely species to be supplemented with both food and nesting cavities in North America, so it makes sense that we would examine these species using our citizen-science platform. We did not expect the results to differ so much between the chickadees and the bluebirds, but we can speculate as to why they did. Eastern Bluebirds have a more limited diet, eating primarily insects and fruit. Chickadees of both species exploit a wider variety of foods, and therefore may not be as sensitive to food shortages during the breeding season. However, our results do not imply that you should stop feeding chickadees. Indeed, surplus food may help them in the nonbreeding season (Brittingham and Temple 1988).

In our continent-wide sample, we found that 10% of Eastern Bluebird nests were supplemented, as compared to 29% of Carolina Chickadee nests and 37% of Black-capped Chickadee nests. While offering insect larvae may not be as mainstream as seeds, it is certainly gaining popularity among bluebird enthusiasts. We are happy to be able to offer some insight into this growing hobby, and we thank every NestWatcher who contributed data to this study. If you would like a copy of either paper, please send an email to nestwatch@cornell.edu.



Dietary Generalists

In all four reproductive measures studied, no improvements (or detriments) were seen for chickadees which had access to human-provided food. Photo © Laura Finazzo



Answering The Call

NestWatchers have contributed to one of the largest studies of the effects of supplemental feeding on reproductive biology. Photo © Cheri Hollis

Meet Our Youngest Member Arjun Jenigiri

In the 2022 March issue of TX Blues, the story on "Valley Ranch Green Club Installs Nestboxes," highlighted Arjun assisting with the nestbox installation, becoming a certified Nestwatcher, and featured several of his photographs. Arjun has joined TBS, becoming our youngest member to date.

His parents, Radhika Lekkala and Sharat Jenigiri, allowed Arjun to share his story and photos with us.

Q: Have you always lived in Texas?

"The hospital where I was born is one mile from my house in Irving." (Parents are from South India and came here for graduate school. Both work in IT field.)

Q: When/what influenced your interest in nature, specifically birds?

"I don't know why.. as far as I can remember, I always wanted to fly like a bird. I like to draw and I used to mainly draw mammals and when I started to draw birds, I really liked them because of all the colors. This got me very interested in birds." (Parents love nature and travel.)

Q: What motivated your interest in photography?

"My dad used to take pictures when we traveled... And one day my dad gave me the camera thinking I might not be able to take a good picture but he said my giraffe picture was good.. I kept on taking pictures and soon my dad gave me his camera."

Arjun's first photo taken while on safari in Africa.



Dad (literally) supports Arjun's photographic endeavors. "Either Sharat or I (Mom) end up having to lift him up so he gets a good picture"



Q: Where have you and your parents traveled, what was your favorite trip, and favorite experience?

"My parents have taken me to a lot of places. my mom says they took me to over 35 countries



though I remember only a few. My favorite trip was to Sky Islands in Arizona. I liked the hot weather and I got to see over 5 types of hummingbirds really close. One of my favorite experiences was photographing flamingos in Peru. Another favorite experience was going on a night tour in Costa Rica with my favorite naturalist/guide Senor Royer."

Q: Where do you go to school? What activities do you enjoy?

"I go to The Humanist Academy in Irving. This school is focused on helping students find their calling. Mr. Vijay lets me go on trips even during school days. Sometimes when I come back from the trip, I share a presentation on what I learned during the trip."

My mom got me membership with the Audubon.

I love to draw, especially birds of paradise.

I love climbing trees.

I love watching documentaries especially by Sir David Attenborough. He is my hero. I really wish I get to meet him.

Every year my school hosts a business fair where we learn to be entrepreneurs. Last year, I wanted to raise money for the World Wildlife Fund, so I sold my wildlife photos and donated all the money to World Wildlife Fund. (**WWF**) I raised \$279.



Arjun sells his photos to raise money for wildlife programs.

This year I want to raise money for [Charles Darwin Research Station](#). (Links to Arjun's donation page.) I will raise the money by selling my wildlife photos. This year I will have more photos and better photos.



Arjun Shares His Love For Nature Through His Photos

Q: Have any of your photos been published?

My tapir picture from the Corcovado National Park in Costa Rica was in the Ranger Rick magazine December edition. Also my pictures got picked by the Editor on the Ranger Rick website a few times.



Awards from Ranger Rick magazine.

Need A Bigger Lens!

Mom reveals "Arjun shoots with a Canon Rebel 55 to 250mm lens. He wants a bigger lens and we told him that he will have to buy the next lens with his money...So he decided to participate in the contests hoping to buy new equipment with the prize money.

Good Luck!

Arjun has entered the Bird Photographer Of The Year contest in the Youth Category. Six of his photos have made it to the final rounds! Winners will be announced in the August/September timeframe.

Success!



Bluebirds laid 6 eggs, 4 hatched in the newly installed boxes at Valley Ranch in Irving. All 4 fledged by April 25th.

Latest Family Adventure - Galapagos Islands



Arjun taking photos of Marine Iguanas in the Isabela Island of Galapagos.



Mom, Dad and Arjun check out the size of the tortise shells at Highlands of the Santa Cruz Islands, Galapagos.

Next family adventure - Puffins in Maine.

Tips and Tricks For Bluebird Landlords



Wasps and Yellow Jackets?

Rub mild bar soap, such as Ivory, on the ceiling and upper portions of walls of the nestbox. Do not spray pesticide inside the nestbox!



Entrance Hole Destroyed?

Metal or wooden hole guards can be purchased, or make your own. Be sure the opening is only 1-1/2 inches.



Don't Do It!

This is why you should never mount a nestbox on a tree or telephone pole or fence or... Predators assume you opened a restaurant just for them.



Too High?

Use an auto mechanic inspection mirror or use the NestWatch app on your smartphone to "look" in nestbox when monitoring.

Fire Ants?

Install a 1 inch ring of Tree Tanglefoot® Insect Barrier as high as possible underneath the predator guard. Reapply periodically.



Predator Guard

Every nestbox should have one!

Deterrent for raccoons, mice, squirrels, snakes, opossums, weasels and cats. Nestbox should be 7' off the ground to deter cats.

Build your own Kingston baffle. [Plans](#) are online.

NO House Sparrows!



House Sparrows are a serious threat to many of our cavity nesting birds. Monitor your nestboxes regularly and remove House Sparrows and their nests early and aggressively.

Need Afternoon Shade!



Heat Shields added to nestbox lowers interior temperature as much as 6.3 degrees. Purchase or [building plans](#)

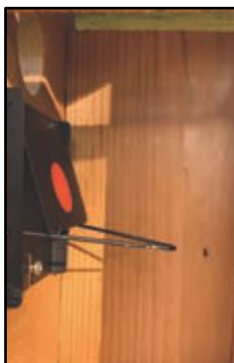
Painting Exterior (only!) a light color can also help reduce the temperature inside the nestbox

Do Not use cracked corn millet or bread at your feeders. Switch to black oil sunflower seeds, thistle and safflower.

House Sparrow Control Tools

Van Ert Trap

Mechanism is triggered when bird enters box. Opening is closed with bird trapped inside. You must monitor! If House Sparrow, dispatch. Otherwise, release bird and reset trap.



Sparrow Spooker

AFTER a bluebird has claimed the nestbox and laid its first egg, immediately install a sparrow spooker. Extremely effective and nesting bluebird will readily tolerate them.



Snake!

Best solution is a predator baffle. Both circular and stovepipe style will work.

You may also loosely wrap netting under the nestbox. Don't forget, you must remove the captured snake.

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Contact Us:
tbs@txblues.org



Welcome New Members

- Stacy Anderson
- Marcie Balatico
- Gerald & Nancy Berend
- Frances Blevins
- Sharon Carter
- Mike Clark
- Katie Close
- Mack Cox
- Beulah Acres Center/
Daniel Arenas
- Flo Decker
- Jay M. Fanning
- Susan Felice
- Ruth Marie Garrod
- Ralph Hallmark
- Myra Hanna
- Penny Hardin
- Marci Harnden
- Nicki Harrington
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- Jackie Milam
- Connie Miskell
- Sara Mitchell
- Andrew Nankas
- Dr. & Mrs. Ryan Oakley
- Michelle Owen-Suitt
- Polly Peters
- Nancy Reasoner
- Margaret Regan
- Adrianna Rogers
- Jessica Rogers
- Darrell Searcy
- Amy Seidenschmidt
- Annette Tunnell
- Pat Warren
- Jane Weil
- Jane Whitcomb
- Jay White
- Tommie Worthy
- Herbert Zschiesche

Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Jon Hranicky
Charlie Hubbard
Linda James
Bill Johnson
Susie Johnson
Robert Johnston
Archie Manning
Jerald Mowery
Dee Myers
John Park
Shannon Ramsey
Judy Ray
Ken Ray
Nelda Reid
Rex Reeves
Vanessa Vosinett
Steve Watkins



Ken Ray demonstrates TBS nestbox features to event manager, Susan Hall, at the Waxahatchie Master Gardener's Lawn and Garden Expo. Event hosted by the Ellis County Master Gardeners.

Host a TBS booth at your next local event!

Canopies, banners, tables, TBS nestboxes, and membership forms will be made available for your use.

Contact TBS for assistance.

tbs@txblues.org

936-439-7114 (Lonnie Castleman)

***Passiflora incarnata* – Passionflower**

by Linda Crum, Master Gardener/Naturalist

I usually write about plants that provide food for bluebirds. But there are plants that will attract insects and spiders thereby providing food for bluebirds. Passionflower is one of those plants.



The plants were given the name passionflower or passion vine because the floral parts were once said to represent aspects of the Christian crucifixion story. **P a s s i o n f l o w e r** , *Passiflora incarnata*, is

a native vine in the southeastern United States, including Texas, and a larval plant for the Gulf fritillary butterfly. The leaves are three-lobed and the flowers are very intricate and beautiful. Passionflower blooms May through August. The three-inch purple flowers are pollinated by bees, other insects and hummingbirds. Passionflower is easily cultivated and looks great on a fence or arbor. But it will produce flowers just growing along the ground. If the plant is very aggressive, count the lobes on the leaves. It may be the five-lobed Asian variety. The three-lobed native is not considered aggressive.

The edible fruit of the passionflower is called maypop, relating to the loud popping sound made when stepping on



the fruit. The fruit is the size of a hen's egg and starts as a green color and matures to yellow. The plant is extremely flammable and should be planted away from your home.

Historically passionflower was used as an herbal supplement in treating anxiety, insomnia, seizures, and hysteria. Passionflower has no serious insect or disease problems. Plant in well-drained soil to prevent root rot in the winter.

The caterpillars of the Gulf fritillary butterfly will eat the leaves of passionflower. No worries though – the plant will recover. The caterpillars will also provide food for birds. Plant this beautiful vine in your garden and let nature take its course.



Host plant for Gulf fritillary. Insects are also a food source for many birds.



Always try to incorporate native plants in your landscaping plans. A great food source/habitat for our native wildlife!