

BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

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Editor: Sheryl Cooper Bassi

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Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY HOSTS SPRING CELEBRATION AND NESTBOX WORKSHOP



LBBS 1st Vice President Kenny Kleinpeter was the Keynote Speaker at LBBS's Spring Celebration.

The Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society held its Spring Celebration and Nestbox Workshop May 7, 2005 at Waddill Wildlife Refuge Center in Baton Rouge, LA.

The day's events started with the Nestbox Workshop at 10:00 A.M. Participants assembled their own nestboxes. After the assembling of the boxes, a presentation was given by Evelyn Cooper, President. Students learned how to monitor and maintain their backyard boxes and trails.

The afternoon meeting began with registration and social period. Following this, Evelyn Cooper gave welcoming remarks. A Certificate of Appreciation was awarded to Elizabeth Hoyt, Cheneyville, for her extraordinary help to LBBS (Con't. page 2)

by monitoring the Hodges Gardens Bluebird Trail this nesting season which LBBS is now sponsoring.

Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge, the afternoon's keynote speaker was introduced. His presentation about the bluebird trails he monitors, the Purple Martin colony he cares for and his Wood Duck Trail was most outstanding. He established and monitors the Kleinpeter Dairy Farm Bluebird Trail, the Kleinpeter Woods Bluebird Trail, the Highland Road Park Bluebird Trail and the Briarwood Bluebird Trail in his own community. On each of the species, he gave excellent information on how to maintain and care for them. He also had some wonderful pictures of the trails and each species.

Concluding the afternoon meeting, door prizes were awarded and enjoyed by all. Those donating the prizes were: Sheryl Bassi, Leland MS; Pat McCormick, Hammond; Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge; Ginger Bowers, Oak Grove; and Jack Hoover, Monroe.



Kenny assists Workshop participants as they construct their nestboxes.



Charles and Carol Cochran, Hammond, enjoy Kenny's presentation on Bluebirds, Purple Martins, Wood Ducks, and other cavity nesters.



Bears Invade Bluebird Trail!!

During the 2004 nesting season, an unusual predator invaded James Dean's trail in Marion, LA. Several bear cubs were looking for a free meal.

These are some of the 40 nestboxes that were damaged with either eggs or babies in them. It was a big relief to James when the bears moved on.

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THANKS TO HELPING HANDS!

To: Jimmie Orr, Oak Grove, Clayton Cooper, Sr., Delhi, Jack Hoover, Sterlington, David Crockett, West Monroe and Cecil Tarver, Livingston for working so diligently cutting 200 nestboxes and putting them together for the Kleinpeter Farm Dairy Bluebird Trail and Kleinpeter Woods Trail;

To: Elizabeth Hoyt, Chenneyville for monitoring at Hodges Gardens this nesting season;

To: Jimmie and Brenda Orr, Oak Grove, Clayton Cooper, Sr., Delhi for instructing participants at the Lake Providence Club.

To: James Dean, Marion, for cutting nestbox kits for the Lake Providence Garden Club workshop;

To: Kenny and Antoinette Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge, Jack and Deb Hoover, Sterlington, Clayton and Evelyn Cooper, Delhi and Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS for participating in the workday and seminar at Hodges Gardens;

To: Barbara Hargrove, Abita Springs, for taking care of refreshments and helping with getting the Spring Celebration set up.

To: Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge for supplying the nestbox kits and for a super program for our Spring Celebration;

To: Lake Providence Garden Club and Winnsboro Garden Club for allowing us to conduct workshops for them and for their many members that joined LBBS!

BLUEBIRDS ARE BELIEVED TO PRACTICE MATE GUARDING

Males of all three bluebird species are believed to guard their mates.

Mate guarding is inferred from research done by Dr. Patricia Gowaty in 1989. She found that male Eastern Bluebirds stayed closer to fertile than non-fertile females. "Males also attended fertile females longer and followed them more often than they did the non-fertile females," according to the Birds of North America (BNA) monograph on Eastern Bluebirds (Gowaty and Plissner, 1998).

That test continues:

"In South Carolina, males guard(ed) females more strongly in multi-cavity territories than in single-cavity territories... In South Carolina, males guard (ed) females who had the most, not least, extra-pair young in their nests, suggesting that males do not guard females with (unlikely) probabilities of mating with other males.

"Females who are off territories most during fertile periods have significantly more young from extra-pair sires than females who remain on their territories more often. (cont'd. pg. 4)

"Males may use cues in female behavior, such as how often she is off territory, to guide guarding decisions.

Male tendency to be aggressive to other males is greater when female is fertile...."

Males were found to "guard mates more strongly when females must forage more often off their territories for more sparsely distributed food".

Research found that 19 percent of Western Bluebird nestlings in a California study were sired by males outside the primary pair, and that 45 percent of all broods studied contained young sired by more than one male.

In one study, males of mated pairs of Western Bluebirds were removed and the activities of the females of the pair were observed. In 53 percent of the cases, intrusions of the new males occurred within 10 minutes of the (temporary) removal of the mated male. Most of the intruding males came from adjacent territories.

Mountain Bluebirds males are said to closely guard their mates from pair formation until after hatching. The male sees to it that the pair forages together. The male also accompanies the female when she gathers nesting material, even though the male does not help with nest construction.

The literature on this behavior states that the male benefits by guarding the paternity of the chicks, while the female benefits by the protection offered by the closely attentive females.

What percentage of Eastern Bluebird hatchlings is the result of extra-pair mating? Research quoted in the BNA account says that extra-pair copulations produced 20 percent of nestlings in studies in Ontario and South Carolina. From 25 to 30 percent of the broods studied were sired by more than one male.

Studies show that extra-pair paternity is more likely when a given neighborhood is more densely populated by nesters. Other research shows:

- Broods on territories of old male bluebirds are less likely to have young sired by other males when compared to broods of younger male birds.*
- Older female birds are more likely to have multiple mates than are younger females.*
- Pairs together longer are less likely to have extra-pair young in their broods.*

Research showed that pairs together for the first time had 37.6 percent extra-pair young, compared with 21.1 percent for pairs mating for the second or greater time.

Information provided by North American Bluebird Society "Bluebird".

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS

"Does clutch size vary with geographic location? The quick answer is yes. Clutch size increases from south to north and from east to west." This quote comes from an article on clutch size in "Bluebird", Journal of the North American Bluebird Society, Winter 2001, Vol. 23, No. 1 edition. Clutches of six eggs are not as common in the south as six or more in the north.

However, this season we have some reports of unusual happenings on the trails and backyards.

Those with six-egg clutches on the first cycle are: Bobbie Boykin, Prairieville; Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge; Dorothy Gammel, Denham Springs; and Evelyn Cooper, Delhi. Kenny reports a clutch of six eggs on the second cycle also.

Kenny Kleinpeter reports that he had two clutches that had white eggs on the first cycle and one on the second cycle. 5% of all bluebirds produce white eggs.

Another unusual happening of the 2004 season was for Don Studer, West Monroe. He cleaned out his nestbox at the end of August. At Christmas time, he took his grandchildren out to the nestbox to explain some things about it. When he opened it, there was a full nest with 5 bluebird eggs in it. The female apparently got busy the first of September and laid them and then they were abandoned. According to Keith Kridler, Mount Pleasant, TX, this happens more than you think.

LEARN MORE ABOUT BLUEBIRDS, PURPLE MARTINS, WOOD DUCKS AND OTHER CAVITY NESTERS!!

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY 4TH ANNUAL MEETING AND BLUEBIRD NESTBOX WORKSHOP

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites you to its 4th Annual Meeting at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge at Monroe, Louisiana on September 10, 2005.

Registration and social hour begins at 1:30 P.M. and the meeting will end at 5:00 P.M. Key note speaker for the afternoon is Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge. He is 1st Vice President of LBBS and LBBS 2004 Bluebirder of the Year, bluebird trail monitor and purple martin expert. He will speak on attracting and managing secondary cavity nesters with emphasis on bluebirds, martins and wood ducks. Kenny's presentation is outstanding. Don't miss it! The public is invited to attend and there is no admission charge.

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites you to learn to build your own bluebird nestbox and receive a year's membership to the organization. The Workshop will be held at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge on September 10, 2005 from 10:00 A.M. until 12:00 P.M. Registration fee is \$15.00. Contact Evelyn Cooper at 318-878-3210 or emcooper@bayou.com

SPIDERS AND THINGS!

Tarantulas in nestboxes! How many of you reach into a nestbox you have not looked in, but feel around to "see" with your fingers what is in the box? ☺ A Tarantula could bite a baby bird if it was hungry or give you a good pinch if you made it mad!

In the south the Brown Recluse spider is VERY dangerous to humans (Shawn, my son, just said he found another one in his bathroom this morning) and these spiders are sometimes found in a nestbox. They are a type of Wolf spider and do NOT spin a sticky catch web for prey but prowl around in search of food.

They are normally smaller than 1&1/2" across their legs and body. A single bite from them would kill a small baby bird. Their venom begins to dissolve soft tissue and flesh with antibiotics used to stop the wound growth.

Black Widow Spiders are commonly found in nestboxes but they spin a very strong web of individual fibers that are "sticky" where they connect to the walls or bottom of a box where insects will walk into the base of the web.

They prey mostly on crawling insects. Their venom affects the nervous system and will REALLY make a human sick, probably lethal for a small bird.

The Red Widow Spider is now found in Florida, an imported Australian cousin to our Black Widow.

A funnel web spider often will use a nestbox. They are not dangerous and their web often plugs up the hole on the nestbox and resembles a dirty gray handkerchief spread outside the nestbox to catch insects falling through the air.

There are lots of other types of spiders that might be in boxes that are not dangerous to the birds or humans. Use caution and "Look Before You Reach" into a nestbox.

Keith Kridler

Mt. Pleasant, Texas

TRUTHS AND MYTHS OF DETERING SNAKES

By: R.J. (Tree) Greenwood

Catlett VA

Member of Cornell University Bluebird List

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Moth balls do NOT deter a snake from climbing. One theory is that the odor of the mothballs masks the odor of the birds. Rat snakes find food by odor, sensing with their tongues. Chemicals in mothballs--paradichlorobenzene or naphthalene or both--aren't harmful to cold blooded snakes and don't block a snakes ability to smell bird.

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It is not healthy for warm blooded humans or birds although you'd have to lock yourself or a bird in a closet with moth balls to get a concentration of fumes high enough to do real damage.

Moth balls are quite toxic if consumed and a real hazard around small children since they resemble jelly beans or candy to young kids. I know of no scientific evidence that moth balls help birds in any way but there's a potential for harm, especially with small children about.

Folks have tried other odor masks like Vicks Vap-O-Rub on poles and sprinkling cedar chips about under nest boxes.

Please make your decisions based on science, actual experiments with controls, peer review and reproducible results. Anecdotal stories must NOT take the place of real research. Concluding that doing something worked based on a small sample is neither valid nor scientific.

Some folks sprinkled moth balls around the poles on which their nestboxes were mounted. They experienced no snake predation in the years that they did so and so they concluded that the moth balls prevented snake predation. They posted their conclusion to a mail list or forum. Some others tried moth balls with similar results but some who spread moth balls lost eggs or nestlings to snakes.

I've read about people who put a ring of garden hose around nestbox poles. They believe that snakes won't cross a garden hose because the snake will think it's a larger snake and posted their theory to forums and email lists. Since they experienced no snake predation, they concluded that putting a circle of garden hose around the poles supporting their nestboxes must prevent snake predation.

Some folks who use predator (from captive fox and coyotes) urine (available from garden centers) around their gardens to deter deer and raccoons decided to spray some around their nestboxes. There was no snake predation so those people concluded that predator urine deters snakes and wrote about it on birding lists.

Still other folks decided that humans are snake predators so they urinated on their nestbox's poles. No snake predation for two years so it must work, right?

WRONG! That's no more logical than my saying that I didn't use any snake protection for years and didn't lose a nest to a snake, so putting up no snake protection will protect nestboxes from snakes. Huh? I was lucky when I first put up some birdhouses many years ago.

Luck didn't last. Sprinkling moth balls or cedar chips or urine at the base of poles makes as much sense as doing nothing makes sense. A lot of people who don't use a snake guard don't lose nests to snakes. But there is no cause => effect between not using snake guards and not losing nests to snakes nor is there a cause => effect relationship between putting stuff on the ground or dancing the Hokey-Pokey around nestboxes three times a week and not losing or losing eggs or nestlings to snake predation.

Other things that I've read in the past year that don't work but were posted as "this worked for me" to email lists or forums that I read: Leaving porch or floodlights on; lots of photos of snakes climbing poles during the day can be found easily. Using 8' or 10' poles rather than 5'; ask Purple Martin land-lords how easily a rat snake can climb a 16' or 18' pole.

Bluebird Societies in many states, Audubon Societies, Conservation Organizations like the Purple Martin Conservation Association, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, as well as independent researchers have done real scientific research using The Scientific Method. They take an idea--hypothesis--and then design experiments to test it. Peer reviews by other researchers in other areas verify the results of studies before they're published in journals.

WHAT DOES WORK: Although no perfect snake guard has been developed, there are proven ways of drastically reduce snake predation.

1) Small-diameter, smooth poles help, like the 'three minute post' described in Using half inch conduit results in far fewer nests lost to predation than wood or larger diameter metal poles. For folks with many nest-boxes on trails and a limited budget, far more birds were fledged than if metal T-posts or U-posts or wooden posts are used. There are more effective methods but those methods are far more expensive and time consuming. Polishing and greasing a narrow diameter pole works, too, but only if the pole is regularly cleaned and re-greased before the old grease collects dust and/or hardens in the sun enough to let the snake easily climb through it.

If you research the archives of the Cornell Bluebird List and of PMCA and others, greased poles were popular for many years. You can find dozens of posts about what types of grease work best.

From my reading, those super-slick oil additives like STP seemed to work well but that's pretty expensive if you have more than a couple of poles. Most used axle or all-purpose grease thinned with a bit of solvent.

I am NOT a big proponent of greased poles. It helps BUT it takes constant maintenance for it to be effective AND spreading petroleum grease about isn't environmentally friendly. To stay effective, grease needs to be cleaned off with solvent and reapplied as often as every 2 weeks, depending on the weather and environmental dust and pollen. What I like about grease is seeing evidence of what tried to climb my pole (or did and got away). I put bird netting under my boxes to trap snakes; I get a few, too.

I definitely DO like things that are efficient and inexpensive. Unless the ground is soft mud, 1/2" ID EMT conduit slipped over 1/2" OD rebar will support even my heavy, home-made Peterson boxes without failure. In autumn, I lift the poles from the rebar, kick the rebar a couple of times, pull it up, put it all in the pickup and take it back to the barn for storage. Over the winter, when the weather isn't fit for outdoor activity, I do my cleaning and maintenance.

Then in late February or March, I take it all out along with a sledge, drive rebar into the ground and slip the EMT back on. A note here, take along a file to remove any mushrooming caused by the sledge. A couple swipes with the file may be needed for the EMT to fit. It's supposed to be a tight fit so the box doesn't windmill around during storms.

2) The 'Kingston Guard' works well, described in

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/birdhouse/bhbasics/guardsto.pdf>

It is proven to stop most snakes. The Kingston stovepipe baffle is the standard for predator protection many Bluebird Societies, including my local society.

3) The 'Krueger Snake Trap' is also effective, <http://audubon-omaha.org/bbbox/nestbox/hksnake.htm>

Bird netting is both inexpensive and effective, especially when combined with a Kingston baffle.

4) Charged electric fence wire alternated with ground wires surrounding the pole is perhaps the most effective but it's expensive, requires power near the poles, and isn't recommended if there are children around.

Personally, I use Kingston baffles AND Krueger traps on my Purple Martin poles. My nestboxes are mounted on 1/2" conduit with Krueger net traps. I also grease the poles so I can see evidence of attempts to climb the poles and to deter ants. So far, so good, but I know that there are reports of snakes that have gotten around all of these measures, too.

From personal experience, I've seen snakes slither along and cross a garden hose, possibly to hide from predators like hawks. I had to remove a Virginia black rat snake from a closet where she curled up on the same shelf with a box of moth balls. I found a gorgeous golden corn snake nestled in a bale of cedar chips (scared the ever-lovin's out of me when I reached in for a handful of cedar chips). I removed a black snake from a nestbox with over an inch of cedar chips in the bottom of the nestbox; poor critter couldn't get back out the hole with five eggs in its belly. I've cut quite a few snakes out of bird netting, also known as Krueger snake trap stuff. Moth balls and other smelly stuff won't protect eggs and nestlings from snakes.

I'll end my latest harangue by saying that snakes are good. They eat rats and mice and bugs. I like having them in my garden and barn where they control rodents much better than feral cats which are far more dangerous to our birds than snakes. Scientists agree. See <http://www.uga.edu/srelherp/ecoview/Eco29.htm> Be glad if you have snakes around... but let's keep the beneficial slithery critters out of nestboxes by using methods that are proven to actually work.

FROM THE PERCH

One of my greatest desires is to get to meet the members of LBBS that I've not met. I hope you will make your plans to be with us for at least one of our meetings. This upcoming meeting in September would be a great one to attend. Kenny Kleinpeter did an outstanding job with his presentation and we want to give our folks in the northern part of the state an opportunity to see and hear it. Don and Barbara Studer, West Monroe and Ginger and Gerald Bowers, Oak Grove, did make it down to the meeting. I am sure they feel like I do that seeing Kenny's program again is worth it. Put us on your calendar, September 10th, Black Bayou Lake Wildlife Refuge, Monroe.

I hope to see you there!

Evelyn

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org

An organization devoted to conservation of all native cavity-nesting birds

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