

# BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

September 2005

Editor: Sheryl Cooper Bassi

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[www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org](http://www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org)

Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

## Dr. Shirl Brunell at Hodges Gardens Bluebird Trail, June 2005



## HODGES GARDENS BLUEBIRD TRAIL Florien, LA

In March, 2005, LBBS received a call from Linda Chance, one of the workers at Hodges Garden asking if we could help in any way with the bluebird trail. She told us that Dr. Brunell, Texarkana, ARK would not be able to come as she usually did this year because of illness.

We discussed what needed to be done and then set up a date for our team to go there and rehab the trail and give a presentation. She told us several of the boxes and poles needed to be replaced. She also asked if we could give a presentation. We set it up to go on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Kenny and Antoinette Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge; Jack and Deb Hoover, Monroe; Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS and Evelyn and Clayton Cooper, Delhi made up the team.

First, the beautiful sign stating the name, founder and sponsor of the trail was erected at the entrance of the Gardens beside the ticket gate. Clayton Cooper, Kenny Kleinpeter and Len Music, manager of the Gardens, installed the sign.

We carried a truck load of nestboxes of which many were made of cypress. We decided that we would replace all of them with the cypress boxes as most had been there many years - since the date of establishment in 1985. These boxes had served their purpose well.

Our team replaced nestboxes, added painted stovepipe guards to the poles and greased the pole. Two with Evelyn's painted Bluebirds were installed near the Welcome Center. Two more complete units were also added to the trail.

Dr. Brunell's original nestbox warning signs stating the federal law and the fines imposed were placed on the new boxes along with LBBS signs.

On Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, a presentation on the "Basics of Bluebirding" was given by Evelyn Cooper and Sheryl Bassi at the Greenhouse.

One blessing that came our way in this project was that Elizabeth Hoyt, Cheneyville, volunteered to monitor the trail. This is a godsend. We all envy Elizabeth that she lives close enough to be able to do it and get to enjoy seeing all the beautiful birds. Our many thanks to her!

Each person on the team had a job and it went like clockwork. All of us fell in love with the place and plan to make an annual visit. It is our plan to continue Dr. Brunell's hard work. It is also our hope that she will be able to be more active in it too. It is definitely a "Bluebird Heaven". If you have never visited the Gardens to see the flowers, you now have another good reason to go - the Bluebird Trail!!! We are so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful endeavor.

In the month of June, Dr. Brunell, her brother, Herb and her secretary, Margaret made a visit to the Gardens and enjoyed the trail. She wrote a wonderful letter to Evelyn Cooper which appears in this issue.

*Left to right: Clayton & Evelyn Cooper, Delhi;  
Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS; Kenny & Antoinette Kleinpeter,  
Baton Rouge; and Jack & Deb Hoover, Monroe.*



### **LETTER FROM DR. SHIRL BRUNELL**

Dear Evelyn:

Methinks you are an angel in disguise. I am so proud of all that you are doing and thank God, you came along when you did. I am just sick over not being able to continue all my bluebird projects. They've been such a joy in my life. I've thought all along since this handicapping disease began seriously to take hold that I'd be able to get back to Hodges Gardens.

(con't. on page 4)

I'm hopeful at some point the treatment begins to make a difference, but the more time that passes the more doubtful I get. I am so glad you are there to back up all the years of work at the Garden.

Thought you might get a kick out of some of the history. Twenty years ago, there was some support for the idea of placing poles in concrete. And what with the areas of soft earth in Hodges Gardens, I got the bright idea to fix the poles in concrete before leaving home. I dug long narrow holes in the ground with a sharp shooter, poured in concrete and then set the poles in the middle. Once hardened, I pushed the poles over into the back of my van and shoved them in, concrete and all. Some years back, I did a slide show about all this at the Gardens and at a North American Bluebird Society annual meeting.

The concreted pole system did work well, but too a lot of work, especially dragging one of those "500 pound" concreted poles "500 miles" to a box site. One of the advantages of this system has been the pole would give a little but not enough to do damage if a mower grazed it. Also, if the pole tilted for whatever reason, it was bottom heavy enough to push it back up to pack the dirt down on the loose side.

Only four predators caused problems in the gardens. The double entry doors were sufficient to deter larger predators. It had a flying squirrel for years in one of the airstrip boxes. The nest in the meadow box between the two trees across from the business office/educational building and down from the big red barn once was filled with acorns.

A queen bee brought a gang of her buzzing buddies and started a hive in one of the entrance boxes.

In another box was a lizard that looked like it had been "brought in for food." It had debris on it like it had been down in the nest with the babies before they fledged.... And it had peck marks on it. Don't think the little creature could have crawled up the pole because it was too slick.

You may have questions about box placement. Most of the boxes are in their original sites. But, one year when there were personnel changes, apparently no one oriented the new workers about the bluebird boxes. It was heart breaking when we arrived and found several of the boxes had literally been mowed down, ripped apart and the poles twisted like spaghetti. From that point on, replacement sites were chosen based on those boxes that had been very productive but were located as much as possible out of harm's way from the risk of being damaged by the mower. Probably the four to five most predictably productive boxes were the "rose garden box" (the one on the right past the rose garden and closest to the lake), the first box far to the left after entering the gardens, the one by the tree by the observation overlook, the first box on the air strip after leaving the green house, and the box on the superintendent's driveway across from the buffalo pen.

After those first years of mounting poles in concrete, I made a "pipe-extension-method" that could be transported in any kind of vehicle. With a variety of lengths of threaded pipes that easily fit in the trunk of my car, I could create pole lengths according to what would work best in what soil. All pipes were ½" inch in diameter and were threaded on the ends so connectors could be added as needed. If you use this method, which is very fast to install, remember to place a cap on the pipe to avoid damaging the threads when pounding the pipe into the ground. Instead of a regular fence post pounder with the arms on the side, I used a single pipe big enough to fit over the pole cap. I think mine is about two inches in diameter which makes the pipe just heavy enough to help with the force of pounding down the pipe. My pounder is two feet long. If you ever use this method, be sure the person positioning the pipe for you has his hands below the end of the pipe as you plunge it toward the ground.

If you use phalanges in mounting new boxes, and by chance haven't used them before, be sure to put a tad of axle grease on the threads because they rust and become impossible to loosen. By the way, don't forget to take two pipe wrenches so if you have to use inline connections to add more sections of pipe. It really is necessary to tighten the connectors with more than just the strength of your hand.

Herb, my very special brother from New Mexico, came to see me a couple of weeks ago and we made a quick trip to Hodges Gardens to see your work and the wonderful sign. It tickles me to death, it is beautiful and you did a great job. Margaret did the driving with her one good foot. I am eternally grateful and consider you a friend for life.

Affectionately Yours,  
Shirl Brunell, Ph.D.

Jack gets the drill  
ready to install the box  
as Clayton installs the  
hanger iron and Sheryl  
greases the pole.





Kenny installs the latch on the Cypress nestbox.



Antoinette keeps records and the renumbering of the nestboxes.



Kenny and Clayton install the unit at the buffalo pen.



Evelyn puts the finishing touches on a predator guard.



Deb, our official photographer watches as Jack installs a unit at the Welcome Center.



Kenny gets a nestbox ready for the Welcome Center.

## *SONGBIRDS AND CATS*

We have two cats that always stay indoors. They are actually scared to go out and never have or ever will. Also, we had a female cat to show up in our dog lot one day. Tried to scare it off and thought we did, but discovered one little kitten up under the dog house. I don't know about the other kittens, but one survived. My sweet husband knew how I felt about cats outside, so he built a frame, put fencing on its walls and roof, then put on screening with a latched door. There is lots of room for the cats (mamma and baby) inside. We keep a fresh litter box food, water for them and these two cats are healthier than my indoor cats. In the winter, we put a heated dog house in the enclosure. They even caught a mole that dared to enter their domain. This is the answer for people with cats. If you keep dogs outside in an enclosed lot, why not cats? They are happy and love to watch everything going on outside. They've been there for three years now. We spent money to have them spayed. I really enjoy having these cats and can still carry on with birding. The only problem is cats roaming around unattended that aren't ours. There is a solution.....Enclose them!

Linda Lawson  
Dalton, GA,  
Member Cornell University Bluebird List  
Article posted on Cornell University Bluebird List

## PUSSY CAT, PUSSY CAT, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

As a child, I lived in a rural area and our family had several cats that were allowed to roam. They often brought home dead mice and other assorted animals. When I was only four, I remember seeing Tom (orange tabby cat) capture a wild baby rabbit. I was horrified. Although I could barely lift that cat, I grabbed Tom around the neck with both hands, picked him up off the ground, and throttled him until he let go of that rabbit. I sported some painful scratches for a few days, but the rabbit got away.

As I got older, I learned that the little rabbit was just the tip of the iceberg. There is no doubt that those cats killed many small mammals and birds that I never witnessed. Well into my childhood, I became involved in bluebird conservation. Free ranging cats are a fierce predator of birds. They kill as many as 4.4 million birds per day in the United States alone. Ground feeding and nesting birds are especially susceptible to cat attacks.

Responsible owners do not allow cats to roam and hunt. A domestic cat on the loose is not a native predator. It competes with native predators such as fox and hawks. Even well fed pet cats will kill animals because that is their nature. The most responsible thing a cat owner can do for native wildlife is to keep their beloved pet indoors.

Keeping a cat indoors is also beneficial for the welfare of the cat. There is a wide range of health hazards outdoors including feline leukemia, distemper, roundworm, hookworm, rabies, ticks, fleas, coyotes (I've heard that cats are their favorite food), cars, traps, poisons, etc.

A couple of years ago, our friend had three cats that her children dearly loved. She allowed them to roam and a neighbor complained to her. A few weeks later, all three of her cats disappeared. People are not as tolerant of free ranging cats as they were when I was a child. It was a hard lesson for her and her children. She has two new cats, but is very responsible about keeping them indoors now.

The second responsible action a cat owner should take is to have their pet spayed or neutered. There are too many unwanted and feral cats in this country. I will be so bold as to speak for chipmunks, baby rabbits and birds when I say we need no more homeless cats (or free roaming cats).

Article con't. on page 9



As a little girl, I looked at Tom and wondered, "Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been"? Today, we should be able to look at our cats and know that the farthest they have been is to the liter box in the corner and back by our side.

Paula Ziebarth  
Powell, Ohio  
Member Cornell University Bluebird List

### **WHY FEEDING BIRDS IN WINTER AND SPRING IS A GOOD THING!**

After considering 300 years of bluebirding history, one thing becomes clear.

Almost all population fluctuations (both negative and positive) have been associated with human activity with one notable exception- nasty weather. Bluebirds caught in severe weather without protected roosting locations and sources of liquid water may perish. They may also starve to death if typical winter food sources are gone (e.g., fruit stripped by starlings) or unavailable (e.g., covered by freezing rain/snow.) It's not just a winter weather issue. Bluebirds that have migrated north to breed may get caught in severe late spring storms. Time to recovery is increased if pre-existing populations were already low.

Some related excerpts from a preliminary compilation of bluebird and bluebirding history (<http://www.sialis.org/history.htm>) provide examples of the impact severe winter/spring weather can have:

In the winter and spring of 1894-1895, the sudden return of cold weather almost wiped out bluebirds in the great lakes and New England. "Thousands of Bluebirds perished in the storms and bitter cold which lasted for a week or more; their frozen bodies were found everywhere—in barns and other outhouses where the poor things had vainly sought shelter; in the fields and woods and even along the roadsides. In the localities affected they were almost exterminated. To many people, it was a sad spring in those regions.

(Source: Birds of America: 1917 and 1936, article by George Gladden) Amos Butler of Indiana wrote in 1898, "The Bluebirds seem to have been almost exterminated. Few, indeed, returned to their breeding grounds in the north and from many localities none were reported in the spring of 1895." (Bent, 1949) It was five or ten years before numbers returned to normal.

1906: During a severe winter in Central Mississippi, much of the normal breeding population froze to death or died of hunger or thirst. (AC Bent)  
(Con't on pg. 10)

1911-1912: Jack Frost struck again, with a very cold winter in the southeastern states, but this was more local and recovery was quick. Musselman estimated that fifteen hundred to two thousand eggs were frozen in his area in April (AC Bent)

1958-60: Severe winters occurred. Trees and shrubs were covered with freezing rain, ice or snow, making berries unavailable. "Frozen bodies were found throughout the bluebird's main wintering range, with estimates that up to 50 percent of the population had perished." (Source: Bluebirds in My House)

1976-78: Another severe winter. Some estimated 60% losses. It can take 3-6 years for bluebirds to recover after a severe drop in numbers. Again, climactic events have a very significant impact on bluebird populations. For example, the winters of 1977 and 1978 almost eliminated populations that had increased as a result of Godfrey's trails in Illinois. (Zeleny)

These examples highlight the importance of providing food and water sources for bluebirds. You can landscape with native plants that produce berries (<http://www.sialis.org/plants.htm>), offer mealworms (<http://www.sialis.org/feeder.htm>) and suet (a plethora of recipes at <http://www.sialis.org/suet.htm>), and provide a bird bath.

Bet Zimmerman

Certified Environmental Professional

Member NABS and TBN

Maintains two bluebird trails

Member of Cornell University Bluebird-List

*LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY invites you to its 4<sup>th</sup> 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. Keynote speaker for the afternoon is Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge. He is 1<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:emcooper@bayou.com)*

## FROM THE PERCH

Come join the fun September 10<sup>th</sup> at our annual meeting. We will be meeting in the brand new building at the Visitor's Center at Black Bayou Lake NWR north of Monroe on Richland. Bring a friend.

You will definitely enjoy Kenny Kleinpeter's presentation on Bluebirds, Purple Martins and Wood Ducks.

Please let me know if you can bring a door prize. See you at the meeting!

Please fill out your end of year nest summary sheet and return to me.

Evelyn

### LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

[www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org](http://www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org)

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

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