

## BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

*September 2006 Volume 18*  
*Editor Sheryl Cooper Bassi*



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[www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org](http://www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org)  
Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society

## **WANTED!**

### **Your Presence At Our Annual Meeting And Workshop**

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites you to attend its bluebird nestbox workshop led by James Berry, of Clinton, Arkansas to be held at the Black Bayou Lake NWR Conservation Learning Center, 480 Richland Place, Monroe, LA on September 16, 2006 from 10:00 until 12 Noon. Registration fee is \$15.00. You will receive a year's membership in LBBS; learn to build your own nestbox; and how to monitor it. Children are especially invited. Call 318-878-3210 or e-mail [emcooper@bayou.com](mailto:emcooper@bayou.com) or [kpkmajk@cox.net](mailto:kpkmajk@cox.net) for questions or registration. Following the workshop and lunch, LBBS will hold its annual meeting detailed below.

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites to you its 5th Annual Meeting at Black Bayou Lake NWR at the Conservation Learning Center, 480 Richland Place, Monroe, Louisiana on September 16, 2006 from 1:30 until 5 PM. James Berry, Clinton, Arkansas is the keynote speaker. Mr. Berry is a member of the North American Bluebird Society Speaker's Bureau and manages ten bluebird trails. This meeting is free and open to the public.



## **WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY!**

At left top shows a nest box near an irrigation valve on the Kleinpeter Farms Dairy Bluebird Trail that could not have a predator guard installed because it would interfere with the crank used to open the valve. Kenny did find some predation so, to be able to utilize the location which Kenny thought was a good one, he decided to put it on a telescoping pole and raise it high above the well and installed a guard underneath it (shown at right).

Kenny did have nesters in the first cycle and thinks it was a little late for a second cycle when he changed it. Next year, we will be waiting to see how it turns out. Height is no problem with cavity nesters and actually is an advantage in many situations, such as scent dispersal. This is definitely one of them.



## Brood Patch Is Important In Incubation

Perhaps you have removed a female bluebird or swallow from her nest to have a look at her eggs or hatchlings and noticed that she had bare skin on her belly.

That bare spot is known as the brood patch, and it plays an important role in incubation and brooding.

A few days before the female bird lays her first egg, feathers on her breast and belly fall out. She loses both outer (contour) feathers and the down feathers beneath. It is believed that increasing levels of the hormone estrogen trigger this feather loss. The estrogen would be a byproduct of breeding and egg formation.

The bare skin contains blood vessels feeding the skin. These vessels expand, bringing greater amounts of warm blood to the area. The heat from the blood is transferred to the eggs or chicks. In addition, the brood patch swells as large amounts of water collect in the tissues beneath the patch. Research suggests that this water also helps transfer heat from the female to the eggs or hatchlings.

The brood patch develops only on those birds that incubate. If male birds do not participate in the incubation, they do not have brood patches. Males that do incubate have patches. Among cavity-nesting species, *Great-crested Flycatcher* and some woodpecker males develop patches. Male birds that might or might not incubate, as is the case for *Tree Swallows*, will have a brood patch if the incubation role of the male is important.

Passerine species—songbirds, like bluebirds, swallows, wrens and chickadees--- have a single brood patch. Other species can have more than one patch, each separated from the others by normal feathering. *Herring Gulls*, for example, typically lay two or three eggs, and will have a brood patch for each.

Waterfowl also have brood patches. Hens of these species will pull down feathers from their breast to help create the patch and then use the feathers to line their nest.

Most birds with brood patches use the patch to warm hatchlings until the young birds have developed the ability to control their own temperatures, usually day five or six for bluebirds.

(Con't on page 4)

When brooding is completed, the blood vessels shrink, the swelling recedes, and the feathers grow back, often before the next molt.

(Copied from "Bluebird", Journal of the North American Bluebird Society)  
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## Trudy's Story

Trudy Pischer lives in Willard, MO and she was such a fan of LBBS and admired our work that she joined us. We are thrilled to have her support. Trudy is a novice bluebirder and tells of her experiences on the Cornell University Bluebird List. She posted the story below that we think you will enjoy.

My husband and I have six EABL (Eastern Bluebird) nestboxes on our 50 acre farm that have all been successfully nested by five EABL and one TRES (Tree Swallow) pair for one brood each. One of the boxes is in our backyard on our privacy fence. The perfect spot actually, as predators can't climb the fence and get in the box and it's shaded by two post oak trees that are about 25 feet away. One brood of five EABL fledged in the spring, and another clutch of five eggs were laid about 17 days later for the second brood.

On Sunday, June 18, the five EABL hatchlings from the backyard nestbox fledged after only 14 days in the nestbox - at least 3-5 days early. Most of my hatchlings fledge routinely after 17 days. This morning after I'd supplied the mealworm feeder about 7:30 A.M., I watched Mon and Dad EABL repeatedly flying top the mealworm feeder, then flying at the ground just below my House Sparrow trap. I quickly discovered a very small baby EABL. I placed him on the shelf holding my House Sparrow trap, where Mom and Dad continued to fly to him and feed. However, so did the territorial Mockingbird. That, and fear that my lab/Shepard would discover baby on the ground and eat him, prompted me to place baby EABL back in the nestbox.

(Con't on page 5)

Mom and Dad immediately flew to the box and continued to feed the fledgling. Interestingly, when I picked the baby up, the parents didn't swoop or dive-bomb me nor did baby utter any distress calls.

I removed the mealworm feeder, but would periodically replenish it and return to the backyard. I stood guard about ten feet away and repeatedly watched Mom and Dad go to the feeder to stock up on worms. Sometimes they went to the nest box to feed the returned fledgling. Sometimes, they went to the trees where I suspect other, more successful fledglings hid among the leaves. The Mockingbird made several attempts to claim the mealworm feeder and chase the EABL away. After some "wing-waving" and yelling of my own, Mr. Mocker decided I was just too scary of a predator to deal with.

At 7 P.M. today, I put out the mealworms for the last time and saw Mom and Dad fly from the feeder to the nest box to feed the returned fledgling. Baby stuck its head out of the entrance/exit hole to snag the mealworm, but quickly returned inside. I even saw Daddy EABL take a poop sack away earlier in the day.

I feel certain that the territorial Mockingbird's harassment of Mom and Dad EABL and claim of that feeder encouraged the parents to urge the babies to fledge early. While the other four baby EABL successfully fledged, this little runt wasn't quite ready to be out in the big world and was quite happy to return to the safety of the nest box. What's strange is that Mom and Dad appeared equally happy to have him there and take care of him.

Trudy Pischer  
Willard, MO  
Member Cornell University Bluebird List

Trudy's story had a happy ending because she is a diligent, faithful monitor. Had she not been there, this little bluebird most probably would not have survived. A lesson to be learned about this is not to put the feeder close enough to the nest box that it can interfere with its normal routine of nesting and fledging.

Have you tried to attract Bluebirds to your yard and just cannot seem to have any luck? It could be your yard is not habitat friendly for Bluebirds or it might mean that you have too many House Sparrows and Starlings and sometimes even birds like Mockingbirds can keep Bluebirds from nesting there. Some people have too many trees with not enough open space for Bluebirds to forge on.

However, Louisiana has a wealth of places to establish any size trail you would want to monitor. There are cemeteries, golf courses, state parks and Wildlife Centers that have wonderful habitat for bluebird nest boxes. Have you considered a place in your town or the suburb of your city to establish one?

Many Wildlife and Fisheries already have some nest boxes up but may need some help in monitoring and maintaining them. At our May meeting in Baton Rouge at Waddill Wildlife Refuge Center, we saw boxes that did not have guards on them. In fact, a Prothonotary Warbler had built a nest in a box that was just a few feet from the porch of the building. It did not have a guard on it and Kenny Kleinpeter installed one very quickly on it. He had made a little walk around the place and saw a snake on the other side of the building. So, I feel like the pair had a better chance of fledging their clutch with the guard added.

We have trails all over the state and if you live near one of them, you might consider volunteering to help out with monitoring. Camp Ruth Lee Bluebird Trail at Norwood is in bad need of some help with it. Kenny made several trips over there as he checked the Dairy Farm Trails, but he really needs some help with it.

We are hoping for some help from the Many Garden Club to help Elizabeth Hoyt and Mary Jo Wright with monitoring Hodges Gardens Bluebird Trail.

It is truly a fun thing to do to monitor a trail and I hope you will consider looking around you to see if you could make one of your own or help in one we have established.

Evelyn Cooper



Jack Hoover, Monroe gives his grandchildren a lift to look into the nest box where they have some bluebird babies. What a joy!

## WHAT GOOD IS A DEAD TREE?

Standing dead trees called *snags* provide birds and mammals with shelter to raise young, and raptors with unobstructed vantage points. Woodpeckers and creepers, feast on wood-eating insects and provide "sawdust" for ants to process. Deer eat the lichen growing on the trunks.

Snags provide homes and fast food for wood-boring insects, ants and termites, which can help decompose the tree and release its nutrients. Even while rotting, a snag's roots help anchor soil and prevent erosion. Rich in humus, a fallen tree can serve as a nurse log for seedlings. Death is a part of the forest cycle. In an undisturbed forest it may take a century for a 12-foot, 3-inch Ponderosa Pine to decompose, but the whole forest benefits from the slow release of nutrients and by-products.

Snag facts:

- Over 500 species of birds, 300 species of mammals, reptiles and nearly all fish benefit from snags for food, nesting or shelter.
- Only 30 bird species are capable of making their own nest cavities in trees. Another 80 animal species depend upon previously excavated or natural tree holes for their nests.
- The insulation of a tree trunk home allows many animal species to survive temperature extremes.

(Con't on page 8)

- Tree cavities and loose bark are used by many animals to store their food supplies.
- Insects living in dead wood eat thousands of forest pests which can harm living trees.
- Fish and amphibians hide under trees that have fallen into the water.

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The forest neighborhood changes, yet the way animals, plants and people depend on each other remains the same. Even as a tree dies, it continues to help sustain life to animal families and eventually to new plants and trees, and the cycle begins again. Hundred of thousands of snags would be saved in America each year, if people were careful when cutting dead wood.

**REMEMBER:** There is life in dead trees!

Article copied from Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project Newsletter

Fall 2005

Sherwood, OR



On July 18<sup>th</sup>, twenty-two Many Garden Club members enjoyed making their own nest boxes at the home of Mary Jo Wright, Many, LA who hosted the workshop and presentation given by Evelyn Cooper. Clayton Cooper and Sheryl Bassi conducted the workshop.



LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP  
www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org  
An organization devoted to conservation of all native cavity-nesting birds

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