

BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

December 2006 Volume 19

Editor: Evelyn M. Cooper



LBBS OFFICERS

President: Kenny Kleinpeter
1st Vice President: John Tidwell
2nd Vice President: Elizabeth Hoyt
Secretary/Treasurer: Sheryl Bassi
Historian: Christy LeGuin
Recording Sec/Public Relations:
Evelyn Cooper

BOARD MEMBERS

Barbara Hargrove	Bobbie Boykin
Clayton Cooper, Jr.	Joe Herring
Judge Jay McCallum	Elizabeth Hoyt
Mary Jane Shearer	Dorothy Gammel
Kirk Guilbeau	



www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org
Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society



Jimmie Orr, Oak Grove, was honored as **"Bluebirder of the Year 2006"** for his work, dedication and support of LBBS. Jimmie got his first pair of Bluebirds in his yard this year and was successful by being diligent about House Sparrow control.



Photo by Wendell Long
Waynesville, OH

FROM THE PERCH

By: Kenny Kleinpeter, President

Evelyn came up with the name “From The Perch” for the president’s message and she was gracious enough to tell me I could call it anything I want. Well, I’m compelled to leave it just like it is just for the sake of tradition.

With the first of hopefully, several cold fronts to give us some kind of change of seasons, things have quieted down in the bluebird community.

I’ve spent quite a bit of time in the woods this last month. In the mornings, it’s such a pleasure to see a family or two of bluebirds hawking the first insects to move in the morning sun. Those sights are actually the real proof of a good fledge. Just because our birds leave the nestbox doesn’t mean they “made it.” Actually, the real risk starts there! One day I’d like to see us go from merely providing nestboxes to providing sustainable habitat. Some thick woods with various berries growing to provide protection from the cold winds and cover from predators; patches of open field for insect harvesting and, as Evelyn has taught me, the real magnet of bluebirds, fresh water, especially in times of drought.

My goal for LBBS is to focus on education and to expand our presence state-wide. Currently, we are really only active in Baton Rouge and Monroe. Having the north and south covered is good but we need to get active in Shreveport and Alexandria where bluebird populations are strong. Down here in Baton Rouge, there seems to be a rough boundary along I-10 that limits nesting success below it. While we have some wonderful members along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, Lafayette and Lake Charles will be particularly difficult to establish.

Our new “focus on education” is the fairs and festivals, especially in the spring that connect us to a mass market of adults who have never seen a bluebird. I worked my first event last month with a booth next to LBBS director, Joe Herring, who also serves on the Wildlife & Fisheries Foundation board. It was a challenge to present bluebirding at a hunting and fishing convention, but conservation has always been an important part of hunting and it’s just as rewarding to raise bluebirds as it is catching fish (at least to me!). Dorothy Gammel, Denham Springs, will be working the Earth Day celebration in Baton Rouge next spring. I’ll be there and look forward to some “wholesale exposure.” LBBS will provide much if not all the materials any member needs to work a booth at an event in your area. Just let us know when and where!

I continue to serve on the national board (North American Bluebird Society) as vice-president. We just launched a rebuilt and updated web site (designed by yours truly). By the time the NABS 2007 convention takes place next September in Athens, GA., we will have laid the groundwork for a new, leaner, meaner international teacher and spokesman for the prettiest, most well-behaved little bird in North America.

As we enter the holiday season, please have a happy and healthy season and, when the next issue of the Nest News arrives, there will be bluebirds everywhere!

-Kenny



James, Berry, Clinton, AR gives instructions to Becky and Tom Garza, Jacki Morgan, Eva and Leonard Colvin, Gail Garret, Libby Rushing and Charlotte Chandler on the construction of nestboxes. Shown below is Black Bayou NWR Conservation Learning Center, Monroe, LA



LBBS ANNUAL MEETING AND NESTBOX WORKSHOP HELD AT BLACK BAYOU NWR CONSERVATION LEARNING CENTER MONROE, LA

Black Bayou Wildlife Refuge's Conservation Learning Center, Monroe, LA was the site of the Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society's Annual Meeting and Nestbox Workshop, held Saturday, September 16.

The Workshop, held Saturday morning, was hosted by LBBS, and led by James Berry, Clinton, AR, ASP officer (Ret.), realtor, and bluebird enthusiast. Participants constructed nestboxes and learned about bluebird behavior and the importance of nestbox monitoring. Berry also served as keynote speaker for the afternoon event.

After welcoming remarks, out-going president, Evelyn Cooper recognized John Tidwell, Monroe, with a "Certificate of Appreciation" for his work and dedication to LBBS. Elizabeth Hoyt, Cheneyville, was named "Project Leader of the Year" for her dedication and work on the LBBS-sponsored Brunell Bluebird Trail at Hodges Gardens, Florien, LA.

Jimmie Orr of Oak Grove was honored as the "2006 Bluebirder of the Year". Mr. Orr has served LBBS in so many capacities; including building nestbox kits for workshops, leading workshops, giving presentations, and teaching trail monitoring to the Oak Grove 4-H club. Orr and his wife, Brenda, have always been counted on to serve LBBS whenever called upon.

Afternoon activities included the election of officers and board members. Elected to serve is President: Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge, 1st Vice President: John Tidwell, Monroe, 2nd Vice President: Elizabeth Hoyt, Cheneyville, Sec/Treasurer: Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS, Recording Secretary/Public Relations: Evelyn Cooper, Delhi, and Historian: Christy LeGuin, Covington. Board Members elected were Bobbie Boykin, Prairieville, Judge Jay McCallum, Farmerville, Dorothy Gammel, Denham Springs and Kirk Guilbeau, Baton Rouge.

After remarks from Pres. Kleinpeter, who also serves as Vice-President of the North American Bluebird Society, the featured speaker, Jim Berry, was introduced. Berry shared his experiences with Bluebirding in the Ozark Mountains, as well as anecdotes about the sport of pigeon racing.

Refreshments were provided by Deb Hoover, Nell Odom and Mildred Hyde, Monroe. The day's events concluded with door prizes.

Bluebirds Migrate To Find Better Weather and Resources

We often think of migration as a seasonal movement of birds during spring and fall to avoid harsh weather. This is only partially correct.

"Migration evolved as a way for birds to exploit resources that are seasonably abundant and avoid times when or places where resources are scarce or weather is very harsh." Dr. Paul Kerlinger wrote in his book *How Birds Migrate*.

Many birds are able to tolerate cold temperatures but if they cannot find food, they must migrate. Dr. Kerlinger goes on to write. "By far the most common type of migration partial migration is characterized by seasonal movements away from a breeding range by some, but not all, members of a species."

Although each of the three species of bluebirds has their own migration habits, all three can be considered partial migrants.

By September, Eastern Bluebirds begin to flock. Flocks may consist of juveniles from earlier nestings or family units being made up of adults and young from the last nesting. Often, many groups will join together to form large flocks. Northern populations of eastern bluebirds will begin to move southward by the end of September or the first of October.

Eastern Bluebirds do not simply shift southward. In some of the warmer areas of the country, many are year-round residents. Often, the birds from Canada and the northern U.S. will leapfrog over areas with many resident birds in order to avoid competition for food. These birds will travel as far as Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida and the southern portions of Alabama, Georgia and Texas.

Not all bluebirds exhibit this type of migration. Some will migrate shorter distances and remain with resident birds throughout the winter. They will face more competition for food but, if they survive, they will have the benefit of being the first to return to their breeding area in the spring. This gives them the benefit of being able to claim the most desirable territories.

There is a certain percentage of Eastern Bluebirds that make no attempt to migrate south for the winter. Many researchers believe that weather has little to do with the number of non-migrating bluebirds. They believe instead that migration has a genetic basis, with some individual birds programmed to migrate and others not.

During mild winters, more bluebirds are noticed in northern areas, but it probably just means that more have survived the milder conditions. During the coldest months, bluebirds tend to stay in very sheltered areas where they are protected from the cold winds, snow and ice. Because they don't come out in the open as much, they aren't as visible to us.

With the lengthening of daylight in January and February, migrating Eastern Bluebirds become more active and begin their northward migration. Weather has a greater influence on the northern movement than it does with the southern movement. As the mean temperature begins to remain above freezing, bluebirds begin to appear. Consequently, Eastern Bluebirds are usually one of the first migrants to return to their breeding areas, usually returning as far north as southern Canada and by early to mid-March.

Mountain Bluebirds are the most migratory of the three species. They too form into family units in late summer and merge with the others to form large flocks. At this time, they may also mingle with the Western Bluebirds. In September and early October, they depart for their wintering grounds. Northern birds start migrating sooner than southern birds. They will travel as far as southern Texas and central Mexico. The extent of their migration seems to be related to availability of fruit and severity of winter.

In milder areas, Mountain Bluebirds will just move to lower elevations within their breeding range. As it gets colder in the mountains, they follow the insects and berries down the mountain slopes and then back up the slopes in the spring.

During migration and winter, Mountain Bluebirds are found in grasslands, deserts, brushy areas, plains and lowlands. They are able to survive lower temperatures than Western Bluebirds, thus they are found in colder regions.

In northern areas, Mountain Bluebirds are considered the harbingers of spring. "There is friendly competition among many bluebirds to see who can spot the first bird of the season," says Myrna Pearman in her book *Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide*. "By mid-March, bluebirds have usually been observed even in the far northern reaches of their range.

Myrna has also noted that bluebirds start arriving two to three weeks earlier in Southern British Columbia than they do in southern Alberta even though they are at similar latitude. The difference is that British Columbia is west of the Continental Divide and enjoys a milder climate than does Alberta.

Western Bluebirds share some migration traits with Mountain Bluebirds. As some stated above, in areas where their ranges overlap, they will flock together. They will also remain in their breeding range in milder areas of the west. Those that do migrate, move into open scrubby forests in the foothills and canyons of the southwest.

During winter, some of their favorite foods are the berries of junipers and mistletoe. The availability of these plants determines the birds' movement through the colder weather; they can become very nomadic in their search for food. Western Bluebirds consume so many berries that they are considered an important dispersal agent for the two species of plants.

All three species of bluebirds share some similar migration behaviors. They all migrate during the day and may join up with resident flocks of bluebirds to find food, water and roost sites. Fall migration seems to be determined by the shortening of daylight rather than weather. Food is still plentiful and weather conditions are still pleasant when they begin to depart. Weather can influence migration, however. Birds may linger longer periods at foraging sites when the weather is mild. When weather turns inclement, it may cause them to move south at a faster pace.

Weather, especially the temperature, has a big influence on spring migration. As the temperature warms, insects become active, and bluebirds begin their journey northward, back to their breeding territories.

Article Written by Sandy Seibert

"Bluebird" Journal of NABS

Summer 2004, Volume 26, No 3

ATTENTION!!!

Sabine Parish Master Gardner's "Down and Dirty II" Seminar

The public is invited to attend; admission fee is \$5.00.

Toledo Lion's Club, 29275 Hwy 191, Many, LA, February 24, 2007 featuring:
Bluebirds - 11:00 AM Speaker: Evelyn Cooper (Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society)
Cypress Bluebird boxes with a year's membership to LBBS included will be available for \$15.00.

Herbs - Speaker: Beth Stringer (Many Garden Club)



Shown above is Kenny Kleinpeter working the LBBS bluebird booth recently at Waddill Refuge Center in Baton Rouge for the 2006 LA National Hunting & Fishing Day sponsored by LA Wildlife & Fisheries Foundation and LA Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries. Kenny talked bluebirds to hundreds of people. He also enjoyed the company of his grandson, Benjamin and daughter, Heather Savoy. (Photo by Joe Herring)

ATTENTION!

The LBBS Board voted to have one meeting annually and that is the annual meeting we have in September that our bylaws require. The spring meetings have so much competition with festivals and attendance is so low, the costs do not justify having it. We decided we would take our message and information where the people are.

LBBS would participate in festivals. Dorothy Gammel of Denham Springs is in charge of our participation in the Earth Day Festival in Baton Rouge which is in April (date announced later). We'll have people to talk bluebirds and Cypress nestboxes to sell that include a year's membership to LBBS. If you can come and help in the booth or build nestboxes (NABS approved), please get in contact with us. We supply a pattern and pay for materials. This is your opportunity to help LBBS in a great way and such fun too!

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS

Putting nestboxes on trees and fence posts is not recommended for Louisiana. We have many snakes and lots of other climbing predators. If you do not have a predator guard on your pole, the eggs, nestlings and parents are in as much danger as if they were on side a tree or fence post. You can easily find directions for predator guards on our website at www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org or at www.nabluebirdsociety.org. If you don't have the means to build one, there are some plastic and metal cone guards in stores that work very well.

Be sure your box faces a tree or an object that the fledglings can fly directly to. It should be no farther than 100 ft. from the tree and no closer than 20 ft. from the tree or bush.

White high gloss paint on the outside of boxes makes for the coolest boxes. Never paint them a dark color. Do not paint the inside of boxes.

Bluebirds will roost in nestboxes in the winter, so it is recommended to leave them up all year. Stuff foam rubber in the vent holes to keep out cold air and line the bottom with foil and a few pine needles or grass.

When feeding a lot of birds, be sure the feeder for the Bluebirds is a good distance from the seed eating birds. Bluebirds will sometimes shy away if overcrowded. Always put the feeders about 50 feet or more from a nestbox.

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF WINTER BLUEBIRD DIETS

By: Kevin L. Berner

Most bluebird enthusiast concentrates their efforts towards providing and monitoring nestboxes during the spring and summer each year. These efforts have helped to reverse the long-term bluebird declines throughout most of the U.S. and Canada. Much less attention has been paid to bluebirds outside of the nesting season.

Winter foods are very important for bluebirds if they are to go into the nesting season at optimum levels of health. I have attempted to identify key winter foods used by bluebirds in upstate New York.

While there are published plans for bluebird roosting boxes, I have not been able to find evidence that these large boxes with internal perches are readily used by bluebirds. Discussions with many individuals at NABS and state bluebird conferences have lead me to believe that roosting boxes as described in bluebird books are rarely used.

However, bluebirds frequently do roost in nestboxes in the winter. It is well documented that individuals or groups of bluebirds will crowd into nestboxes on winter nights. Nestboxes are far smaller than roosting boxes, so the body heat of the birds would be to keep the area warmer than in a larger box. In addition, many bluebirders plug all ventilation holes in their nestboxes during winter to minimize heat loss of birds using the boxes.

At the end of the winter, if bluebirds did use a nestbox for roosting there is usually a large accumulation of droppings on the floor. For the last several years, I have collected these droppings on my first spring visit to the boxes to clean them out for the nesting season. I have taken these droppings and planted them in small trays that are commonly used for rearing garden plants from seeds for transplanting.

The plants that germinate are plants that the bluebirds had chosen for winter foods. I have wanted to identify these winter foods so that I could plant or encourage those same plants on my own property to support over-wintering bluebirds.

What I have found is that the vast majority (probably 95 percent) of the germinating plants from the bluebird droppings are staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*). These seeds can often be identified by the remaining red fuzzy material on them from the sumac seed heads.

A second plant that has germinated in much smaller quantity has been poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*). I have not identified any other germinating plant but often have noted among the droppings the seeds of nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*). Those seeds are easy to identify to their large size and distinctive round and flat shape.

(Having eaten many nannyberries in the field, I am familiar with these seeds, similar to watermelon seeds but round. During my attempts to germinate seeds from bluebird droppings, I have never observed any nannyberry seeds germinating in my seed pots. I have since learned that nannyberries need a period of cold (which they get in the nestbox), then a period when some roots start to develop, followed by another cold period before they start above-ground growth. Some other seed types may undergo a similar process and thus would not have germinated in my tests.)

Once the sumac seedlings have developed in my seed pots, I have transplanted them into my yard to establish this food source for bluebirds. Sumac is often viewed as a "weed" and cut down. I view this plant as a valuable native shrub with spectacular red fall foliage and striking red seed heads that stand out vividly against the cover of winter snows.

Many species such as American Robins, Gray Catbirds, Ruffed Grouse and Wild Turkeys will consume its fruit. Sumac is good winter food because the seeds are very persistent and are available even late in the winter unless other birds have already eaten them.

I have learned that I need to put cages around the developing sumac shrubs because the very succulent and soft new growth of young sumac is heavily used by deer. The protected plants have been very successful at establishing themselves.

I also attempted a more natural establishment procedure for growing sumac. I tilled a long strip in my yard and directly seeded the droppings into the ground. When I did this, the grasses and wildflowers quickly reinvaded and I never detected a single fruited plant developing from these sites.

I would encourage others to collect, not discard droppings found in your nestboxes after the winter. Once you determine the plants that bluebirds are surviving on during the winter, you can too encourage those plants within your own yard. This will help you to support bluebird winter survival and increase spring vigor while attracting bluebirds to your neighborhood for observation.

Article copied from NABS "Bluebird" Journal, Vol. 28, No. 1

**LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY
NESTING SUMMARY 2006**

Complete at end of nesting season and mail to LBBS, P.O. Box 983, Delhi, LA 71232

Trail Name: _____

Member Name: _____

Address: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Total by Species:

EASTERN BLUEBIRD:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

PURPLE MARTIN:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

CAROLINA WREN:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Eggs Fledged: _____

CAROLINA CHICKADEE:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

HOUSE SPARROW:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

WOOD DUCKS:

Total boxes Occupied: _____

Total Eggs Laid: _____

Total Eggs Hatched: _____

Total Fledged: _____

Species used boxes: Please Circle

Eastern Bluebird Carolina Wren

Carolina Chickadee Purple Martin

House Sparrow Prothonotary Warbler

Wood Ducks

Total Nestboxes Occupied: _____

Total Species included: _____

If you had species that nested and are not listed, please include on this sheet on back.

Comments: _____

Please be reminded that this will be your last issue of our newsletter if you have not renewed your membership. Thanks for your support!

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM
(This form may be copied and distributed.)

NAME _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE & ZIP: _____

E-MAIL: _____

New Membership Renewal

_____ Individual Membership \$7.50

_____ Family Membership \$15.00

_____ Lifetime Membership \$250.00

_____ Organizations \$25.00

_____ Small Business \$25.00

_____ Corporations \$100.00

_____ Donation \$ _____

Your cancelled check will be your receipt. To save money, receipts are not issued unless specified. Please ask if your company or your spouse's company has a matching gifts program to augment your contribution. Inquiries for information concerning matching gifts may usually be made at the company's benefits office.

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society is recognized as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and contributions are tax deductible as allowed by law.

**Mail this form with check or money order to
Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society
P.O. Box 983, Delhi, La. 71232
An Affiliate of North American Bluebird Society**