

# BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

Volume 20

*Evelyn M. Cooper, Editor*

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

## GET READY FOR SPRING!

### Sabine Parish Master Gardener's "Down and Dirty II Seminar

The public is invited to attend: Admission \$10.00 which includes lunch.

Toledo Loin's Club, 29275 Hwy 191, Many, LA, February 24, 2007 featuring speakers:

9:00 Beth Springer (Many Garden Club)– Herbs

10:00 Cathy Mc Curdy To Be Announced

11:00 Evelyn Cooper, (Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society) – Bluebirds

Beautiful Cypress bluebird nestboxes will be available for \$15.00 which will include a year's membership to Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society.

Come and enjoy the fun and get ready for spring for your garden and for your boxes in your gardens and yards!

## FROM THE PERCH

By: **Kenny Kleinpeter**  
President



It's that time of year again when everything comes back to life.

This year is bittersweet for me because I'll be moving across town and leaving my 150-pair martin colony, 10 wood duck boxes and absolutely adorable pair of bluebirds. I think I should place a restriction on my old house that whoever buys it must take good care of all the birds. I'll be moving by the lakes near LSU where birds are particularly abundant. Even so, I wonder if the surrounding habitat is sustainable for them. It's easy enough to put up a nestbox but ensuring that the particular bird species has the room, food, water and protection from predators that it needs can be a huge challenge - especially in the city.

In keeping with my personal goals for LBBS of expanding our reach throughout Louisiana, I'll be speaking to the Gulf Coast Bird Club in Lake Charles in February and hope to make trips to Alexandria as well.

The board is preparing to make a big presentation at the annual Earth Day festival in Baton Rouge that would pave the way for hopefully, many more such venues.

On a sadder note, I must report that I recently resigned from the North American Bluebird Society. In six months, I did manage to redesign their website but, I just didn't have the time to serve both us and them. State organizations are more action focused than political and this is one thing I like about LBBS. Trying to influence politicians is a very expensive undertaking and we choose to stay out of the fray. Our membership dues are very low and the board makes sure that every penny is devoted to programs involving education.

That education is centered on the nestbox. The bulk of our resources center on nestbox production because, with everyone's first nestbox is the opportunity to attract that first pair of bluebirds. Then, if they know what to do after the birds show up, a potential life-long relationship with nature can begin. Our website, speakers program and festival booths provide that education component.

The board is organizing a super program for our next meeting in September in Baton Rouge. Please plan to attend.

Watch for details upcoming!!!

Have a great spring!

Kenny

## TIME OF EGG LAYING

At what time of day do Eastern Bluebirds lay their eggs? And, why might one time of day be more advantageous than another?

Two Canadian researchers pursued answers to those questions in a project conducted in Ontario in 1994. Results of that research were published in *The Wilson Bulletin*, Vol. 107, No. 2, in 1995. Information for this summation of that work is taken from that article.

The time of day a female lays her eggs varies with species. Most songbirds lay shortly after sunrise, however. Exactly when laying occurs is difficult to determine, for obvious reasons, but knowing this can be important for people studying the strategies various birds use to ensure successful reproduction.

Male birds, for instance, often try to mate with females of neighboring pairs, to take every opportunity to pass along their genes. Male bluebirds are among those species engaging in mate guarding, a behavior intended to prevent copulation by its mate with another male.

In most songbirds, eggs are fertilized at 24 hour intervals. The next egg in a sequence is fertilized in the hour after the laying thus indicates the time of fertilization, according to the authors of this study.

In species where male birds compete with each other for copulation with females, the hour after egg laying should be the best time for copulation attempts.

This is because mating at this time offers the best chance to be the male who fertilizes the next egg.

This then becomes the time when mate guarding is most important.

The female Eastern Bluebirds in this study all laid their eggs after 6:30 a.m. local time, and at least one hour after sunrise. The median time of egg laying was approximately two hours after sunrise.

The time of egg laying varies considerably among species. Other research projects offer this information: Red-winged Blackbirds, for instance, lay as early as 4:30 a.m., Tree Swallows tend to lay between 5 and 7 a.m. For Gray Catbirds, egg laying tends to come about two hours after sunrise. American Robins were found to favor midmorning, an average time of 10:30 a.m.

Why morning? Early or later? The authors of this study said that this question has not been frequently addressed. A few hypotheses have been presented, however.

One researcher suggested that females lay early in the morning to free them for routine daily activities that otherwise might endanger the egg. Eggs are most vulnerable to harm just before they are to be laid. If an egg is laid in the early morning, the critical hours fall at night when the female bird is likely to be least active, offering small threat to the wellbeing of the egg.

Having an egg in the oviduct does not seem to constrain robins, however.

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And so, another researcher attributed egg-laying times to the times the birds find best for copulation.

Another theory suggests that feeding strategies can influence the time of laying, Tree Swallows, for instance, might be expected to lay early in the day. Free of the weight of the developed egg, the female swallow would be better able to fly important because this species takes all of its food on the wing. As the day progress and warms, more insects are aloft, thus making aerial maneuverability later in the day important to female Tree Swallows.

Such species as Eastern Bluebirds or American Robins, which forage on the ground or from a perch do not need to fly as much, "the authors wrote". Holding an egg is probably of little consequence to foraging efficiency." They add, however, that these hypotheses have not been adequately studied, and that other reasons might exist to explain timing. They say that most likely different factors come into play for different species.

In an interesting aside, the authors mention that female Brown-headed Cowbirds lay their eggs on average nine minutes before sunrise. Seven species of birds chosen by the cowbird to host eggs all lay their after sunrise. The research project from which this information was taken suggest that laying early might be an adaptation the cowbird has made to help ensure that its eggs remain in the host nest and are incubated.

(The previous article is provided by "Bluebird" Journal of North American Bluebird Society, Fall 2005, Vol. 27, No. 4)

It is recommended that monitoring be done in the afternoon so as not to disturb the females while they are on the nest since they lay their eggs in the mornings. Some have laid their eggs as late as 11:00 or after in some monitors' experiences.

A songbird can sing two notes at the same time by controlling its two voice boxes independently.

Songbirds have a poor sense of smell. If you need to touch the fledglings or remove them for any reason, the female will not abandon them.

Plant a Native Plant. There are many benefits to planting native plants in your yard either exclusively, or in addition to plants that may already be established. One huge benefit of native plants is that they provide habitat for songbirds and other animals. Unfortunately, habitat loss has resulted in declining numbers of songbirds and other species. Help replace that habitat by introducing native plants into your landscape.

Paint your boxes that are in full sun white (high gloss) and they will be cooler in the hot months of nesting season. Never paint the inside of the nestboxes.

Cats can jump six feet high and land on a nestbox. Place them higher for the birds' safety.

## Cat Food For Thought

Farmers often rely on barn cats to control rodents that feast on livestock grain. Others may struggle with whether to let their feline outdoors. There is plenty of entertainment outside and no litter box to clean (although the cat may end up using the neighbor's sandbox instead). However, it is not easy to have to inform your child that the family pet has been killed by a car. A friend of mine came home from work one day to find her cat lying on the doorstep with its throat torn out, probably by a Fisher.

Indoor cats can be quite content. They are definitely healthier and live longer. Free-roaming outdoor cats typically live less than five years, while indoor cats may live to be 17 or older. In addition to cars and animal attacks, outdoor cats are exposed to hazards like poisoning, human abuse, and contagious diseases, many of which, like feline leukemia, are fatal. Last July, one feral cat in Pomfret, CT tested positive for rabies. Outdoor cats can also pick up parasites like roundworms. They can transport deer ticks into your home, increasing the likelihood that family members might become infected with a tick-borne illness like Lyme Disease.

Another threat is Toxoplasma. Although it causes no symptoms in many people, it can lead to serious brain damage in those with weak immune systems.

Once infected, you are infected for life. Cats play a major role in transmitting this parasite. According to the New York Times (06/20/06), a single infected cat can shed 100 million egg like cysts in its droppings. The cysts can survive in the soil for over a year and contaminate wildlife and drinking water. Dr. Milton M. McAllister, a parasitologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, says "It's perfectly safe to keep a cat. Just keep it inside." Finally, many people believe a love of wildlife is incompatible with letting cats outdoors. Regardless of how you feel about this, cats are natural born hunters. No one knows exactly how many birds are killed by cats each year, but estimates run in the hundreds of millions. One Michigan survey indicated a domestic cat killed on average between 0.7 and 1.4 birds per week. Next to habitat loss and fragmentation, outdoor cats are considered the most serious threat to songbird populations worldwide. While birds that nest or feed on the ground are at greatest risk, fledglings that can not fly well are also a target. Since some areas only have one or two pairs of uncommon birds like Bobolinks, the loss of even one nesting bird can have a real impact on local populations.

Well-fed cats will still kill birds and animals. A cat with a bell on its collar can stalk silently so the bell does not ring, and even if it did, a bird does not recognize the connection between a bell and a predator.

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In one study in Kansas, researchers were surprised to find that a de-clawed cat actually killed more animals than any other cat monitored. Former cat owners who abandoned their pets are responsible for millions of homeless cats. A homeless cat that is neutered and released will continue to hunt and kill. Because many cats have a lot of bacteria and viruses in their mouths and tend to bat prey around (causing severe internal injuries), about 80% of their victims die even if they receive immediate treatment by a wildlife rehabilitator.

Despite the downsides, about 65% of owners do let their cats roam free. Each cat owner needs to make their own choice, but hopefully it will be an informed one. A cat that has never been outdoors will be happy inside. One option for cats already accustomed to being outside is to set up an outdoor enclosure/play area or cat run. Consider confining outdoor cats during bird nesting season. Feeding feral cats creates large cat colonies, as strays often reproduce where there is a source of food. No matter what you do, a cat will probably always think it is on the wrong side of a door. For more information and options, see [www.sialis.org/cats.htm](http://www.sialis.org/cats.htm)

Bet Zimmerman is a Certified Environmental Professional and a member of the Woodstock, CT Conservation Commission.

Ms. Zimmerman is also a member of the Cornell University Bluebird List and is webmaster for the *Bluebird List Archives*. Article originally published in the Woodstock Villager on December 1, 2006



Shown above is Sheryl Bassi checking out a nestbox at the Hodges Gardens Bluebird Trail at Hodges Gardens, Florien, LA last season. The smile on her face means "a clutch of eggs"!

Elizabeth Hoyt of Cheneyville has monitored the trail for a couple of seasons. She is now the proud mother of a new baby and will need some help.

Mary Jo Wright of Many (near Hodges Gardens) helped monitor in July and August last season and has offered to help again this year. Mary Jo has enlisted some help from some of her wonderful Garden Club friends.

Some of you may remember that a team of workers went to Hodges Gardens two seasons ago and rehabbed the trail. The boxes were replaced with beautiful Cypress boxes and we also added painted stovepipe predator guards. Everywhere we stopped we saw and could hear Bluebirds singing. We hope to be able to continue to take care of this beautiful trail. The late Dr. Shirl Brunell worked so hard to establish and care for and has left it for those of us that want to help our cavity nesters at a time that it getting harder and harder for them to find a place to nest.

Several people did not send the number of fledging hatched, so since the information would not be correct, totals is given for the number of eggs and babies hatched.

SPECIES	EGGS	FLEDGED
Eastern Bluebird	3,074	1,348
Carolina Chickadee	384	194
Carolina Wren	303	148
Prothonotary Warbler	14	5
Purple Martin	794	590
Wood Duck	286	195
Titmouse	8	8
House Sparrow	4	3



Shown above is Mary Jo Wright (left) Many and Melinda Johnson, Longview, TX at the 2004 Hodges Gardens Bluebird Seminar and Nest Box Workshop. They receive assistance from Clayton Cooper, Delhi on assembly of their nest boxes. LBBS is happy to be back in May to do a Master Gardner Bluebird Seminar on February 24<sup>th</sup>. (Details on page 1)

**ATTENTION: EARTH DAY APRIL 22<sup>ND</sup>, BATON ROUGE, LA**

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