

BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

Volume 24

Evelyn M. Cooper, Editor

March 2008

An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society



Photo by: Wendell Long
Waynesville, OH

**From The Perch
By:
Kenny Kleinpeter
President**

Dear Friends and Members:

Here it is, just early February and spring appears to be already in the air! The (Purple) Martins have begun arriving; Wood Ducks are busy laying and we've already seen (and heard!) female Bluebirds singing away from atop nestboxes so, it's definitely time to spruce up those boxes and "let the games begin." On the other hand, I've also seen starlings and house sparrows trying to take boxes intended for native, protected species. Please remember to properly manage any box you put up!

We're already beginning to prepare for our Earth Day booth. If you are in and around Baton Rouge on April 20th, look for the LBBS booth. It's a fun and energetic time with all the child-oriented games and hand's-on visuals like real eggs and nests. I think we made the right move in focusing on these types of events as opposed to the workshops. We'll continue to develop materials and activities that best suit our mission. Any help and advice that you can give us is appreciated!

The board just approved a membership incentive of supplying a predator guard with family memberships at our next annual meetings. We hope that this not only increases memberships but gets across our message that a nestbox is not a nestbox without a predator guard (as well as proper management!). Anything worth doing is worth doing correctly, right?!

We're very proud that one of our own, LBBS member former-Senator Robert Barham has been appointed secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries! Knowing that the secretary concerns himself with "non-game" species like bluebirds is very encouraging. We wish him great success at LDWF!

I'd like to thank Arkansas member, James Berry for donating over 30 of his nestboxes to LBBS. Jim makes an excellent box that we'll use for future projects like sponsored trails. It's always amazing to me how important our neighboring state members are to LBBS. MJ (GA), Sheryl (MS) and Jim prove that it's not about "our backyard" but about various cavity-nesters all around this great country in particular need of our help. Thanks, neighbors!

Kenny

**EARTH DAY
APRIL 20, 2008
BATON ROUGE, LA**



Dr. Sam Scurria, Delhi gave his “Building Bluebird Nest Boxes” presentation to the Delhi Garden Club on January 8, 2008. The meeting was held at the Delhi Presbyterian Church. He presented several different types of boxes all having North American Bluebird Society recommendations. His work is excellent as well as beautiful. One box was made from a log and he had made an opening in the back of it for cleaning and monitoring.

Dr. Scurria had a display of many types of tools that are useful and help make the building process easier. He told us to be very careful and related a little story to us how he took himself to the emergency room of the Delhi Clinic and stitched up his finger that got nicked by the saw.

He talked about predators and showed us different guards that help protect the eggs, babies and parents as they take care of them. He uses a six inch PVC pipe as a guard and it is constructed in the same manner as the stove pipe guard.

Dr. Scurria is a multi-talented person. He had some boxes that had beautiful bluebirds on them that he had painted. He builds many nest boxes for people. He is also very talented musically and to end his presentation, he reached in his pocket and brought out his harp and gave a very nice rendition of “Beautiful Dreamer” to the garden club. It was a hit!

Con’t on page 3



Dr. Scurria, Delhi, ends his presentation about bluebird nest boxes given to the Delhi Garden Club on a very lovely note! He is now retired and can enjoy to the fullest his hobbies and talents. LBBS is happy that includes bluebirds and cavity nesters and thanks him for all he does.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

All of us have within us the love for the bluebirds and cavity nesters. No matter how great or small, each effort really counts for the birds. If you can find one person, young or old, to mentor and help them put up a box in their yard or establish a trail, it helps. One nest box in a yard can produce as many as ten to fifteen fledglings in one nesting season.

We have youngsters just waiting to be told about the world of bluebirds and cavity nesters. If you think you can go to a school and give a little 30 minute talk, LBBS will provide a tape on “The Basics of Bluebirding” which is a hit with all ages. You could tell a little about your experiences. Or, you could make up your own program. Please get in touch with us if you can do this.

Volunteer to help monitor a trail near you. Monitoring is learning hands-on and is one of the greatest educational tools.

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS

Congratulations to Alethea Brown, Mandeville for her first Bluebird egg on February 12th!

Get a jump start on the wasp by putting Ivory bar soap on the ceilings and down the walls of the nest boxes when the weather is barely warm. The wasps will cause the birds to abandon the box if they get a start building the nest.

Grease the poles. This can be done at anytime, but preferably after the nest is built or first egg is laid. Mystick #2 all purpose grease in the green tube at Wal-Mart is lithium free if you are concerned about that. Grease stops the ants and tells you if other predators try to climb the pole.

If you find your nest box is being competed for by another native cavity nester, you can quickly put up another unit about ten to twenty feet from the existing one and they will eventually settle their dispute and be good neighbors. All *native* cavity nesters are protected by law, so do not remove their nest once it is started. Supply another box.

President: Kenny Kleinpeter
 1st V/P: John Tidwell
 2nd V/P: Elizabeth Hoyt
 Sec/ Treas: Sheryl Bassi
 Past President
 Recording Secretary
 Public Relations:
 Evelyn Cooper
 Historian: Christy LeGuin
 BOARD MEMBERS:
 Barbara Hargrove
 Clayton Cooper, Jr
 Bobbie Boykin
 Jay McCallum
 Mary Jane Shearer
 Dorothy Gammel
 Yvonne Bordelon
 Mildred Hyde



The picture above shows we can make our trails attractive along with the help of some wildflowers and a little art work or even just painted boxes. (Remember to paint them light colors because dark colors absorb heat) . Even though they look close to the box, there's about twenty feet between the flowers and the nest box. Only short grass should be around the boxes to discourage snakes. This is on Evelyn's trail of 30 boxes. It is just a few feet from where a 42 inch pipeline was being laid last nesting season and had a tremendous amount of traffic. The parents raised two broods oblivious to it all.

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS (con't)

For those of you fighting House Sparrows, (HOSP), you can go to www.sialias.org and learn about aggressive and passive control methods. Using the aggressive control method, you can find sites for inbox and ground traps which aid in thinning out the HOSP population. Using the passive control method, the "Sparrow Spooker" is very effective for keeping the HOSP away after the egg has been laid. It only keeps the HOSP away from the box and you must remember that he/she will move on to another territory or even one of your boxes.

If you cannot dispose of the HOSP yourself, you can find a rehabber that is always grateful for food for the raptors. Many of our members have to do battle with the HOSP every year, but being diligent can help you win the war. LBBS members have used both inbox and ground traps and reported of their success.

LESSONS FROM SNAKES

BY: Benjamin E. Leese

Snakes are a common predator at bird nests, including artificial cavities. Until recently, most nest predation studies focused on identifying predators at the nest, usually in hopes of minimizing predation events. However, recent research turns that equation around and instead presents insights about the snakes themselves and predation as a selective force on birds.

Recent work has identified some basic patterns of snake predation on nests. Stake and colleague studied predation through video observations on four open cup nesting species. They reported that all species in their study except the Texas Rat Snake preyed upon nests mainly during the day. Predation events ranged all the way from consuming eggs to even pinning and consuming the brooding parent. Snake predation also caused force-fledging. For at least one third of the nests, snakes returned to the site after the initial visit. Most of those visits happened within one hour after the initial predation, presumably in an attempt to capture adults or force-fledged young from the nest. The researchers also found that the rate of snake predation increases with the nesting period.

Another important question involves whether or not nest predators are opportunistic or specialized in preying upon nests. While snakes are common nest predators and one might expect at least some species to specialize in nests, that does not appear to be the case. Because nests are a seasonal resource, a nest specialist snake species would not have a year round food source. Furthermore, snakes do not even appear to specialize seasonally in nests. A study in 2003 found that small mammals continued to be found in the diet of the Black Rat Snakes

Con't on page 6

throughout the summer. Although birds were added to the diet, there was no evidence of specialization. Snakes appear to prey on nests opportunistically, although it is possible that some individuals might specialize during the nesting season.

While snakes do not specialize in nests, they use both scent and sight to help them find bird nests. Scent might serve as a cue that some snakes use to find nests, but the fact that many bird species remove fecal sacs from the nests makes that cue seem less likely. Visual stimuli seem the most likely cues used by snakes, and such a pattern has been documented in the laboratory in the case of the Gray Rat Snake.

The use of vision to find nests also explains the observed pattern of nest site predation increasing as nesting, activity continues. Alexander Skutch first proposed that hypothesis that predation risk increases during nesting because of increased parental activity around the nest; parents make more trips to the nest to bring food as the young continue to grow. Those more frequent trips appear to increase the likelihood that a snake or other predator will find the nest. Nest placement is a large factor in predation risk, but once that is controlled for experimentally, Skutch's hypothesis seems correct. This risk based on feeding frequency at the nest also appears to be a major factor in controlling the number of eggs birds lay in a clutch.

While snakes are formidable predators, birds have a wide variety of behaviors that help reduce the risk of predation. For instance, nests can be positioned where predation is less likely, as the case of Acadian Flycatchers that prefer

SPECIAL THANKS!

to nest in Nuttall Oaks to take advantage of the fact that snakes have difficulty in climbing its smooth bark. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers even modify their nests to create areas of sticky sap that often prevents snake predation.

Some birds might even select nest sites that are thermally inhospitable to snakes, which cannot control their own body temperature. However, the question of how birds reduce predation risks remains a fruitful field for additional research. These recent studies have shed some light on snake-bird interactions, but much remains to be learned from careful studies of snakes and birds.

Article provided by the "Bluebird" Journal of the North American Bluebird Society.

The stovepipe and cone guards are recommended for climbing predators, especially snakes and raccoons. Snakes enter the boxes and consume the eggs or babies and leave the nest undisturbed. A cat can jump over six feet high, so even with a guard on the box and no higher than 5 1/2 feet, the cat could jump up to the box. Occasionally there have been reports of snakes getting past the guards, but these are usually the long snakes that can stand on their tails and attach themselves to the seams of the stovepipe or make its way around the cone guard. Some people that have experienced this use a 36 x 36 hardware cloth right up under the nest box. It is a little hard to monitor, but there have been reports that it is successful. I've never had that problem and I have many snakes.

EARTH DAY APRIL 20, 2008

Baton Rouge, LA

If you can come by and help hand out pamphlets and any other way we need you, it will be greatly appreciated. We see thousands of people children and adults and it is a worthwhile effort.

To: Jack and Deb Hoover, Monroe and Matt Pardue, West Monroe, for helping Paula and Richard Gates to check the Trenton Street Golf Course Bluebird Trail and rid it of House Sparrows. A big "thank you" to Richard for moving all the boxes to a better location for Paula.

To: Mary Jo Wright, Many for giving her presentation to the Garden Club of Pineland, TX and bringing members for us.

To: Dr. Samuel Scurria, Delhi, for his very informative presentation to the Delhi Garden Club in January;

To: James Dean, Marion and Mildred Hyde Monroe, for representing LBBS at Black Bayou on "Wild Fridays" and James for giving a presentation to a group at D'arbonne Lake and Farmerville Garden Club in February.

To: John Tidwell, Deb Hoover and Jack Hoover, Monroe for the splendid job they have done with the Leo Terzia Memorial Bluebird Trail at the LA Dept. of Ag. & Forestry on Highway 80 east of Monroe; (I pass by there frequently and see their wonderful work.)

To: Margaret Kemp, Carolyn Martin and Mary Jo Wright, all of Many for their excellent work at the Hodges Garden Bluebird Trail in Florien, LA.

To: Tom Allen, Oak Ridge for establishing a trail in his town and getting people excited and involved.

To: Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge, for taking such good care of the Highland Road Observatory Bluebird Trail. He took Sheryl and I on a little tour to see the trail on our last trip down. The trail has two nesting pair of Bluebirds which was a surprise because it is not very large. He also had a Carolina Chickadee nesting. He monitors the Kleinpeter Dairy Bluebird Trail, The Kleinpeter Woods Bluebird Trail and the Campfire Bluebird Trail at Norwood.

Thanks to all for a job well done!

NESTING SUMMARY 2008

MONITOR	SPECIES	EGGS	HATCHED	FLEDGED
1. M.J. Shearer Tucker, GA	EABL	48	34	34
	BHNU	6	6	6
	CACH	5	5	5
2. Tom Allen Oak Ridge	EABL	8	8	8
	HOSP	6	0	0
3. Travis Freeman West Monroe	EABL	14	12	12
4. Joshua Johnson Dry Prong	EABL	2	2	2
5. Sam Scurria Delhi	EABL	4	4	4
6. Mildred Hyde Monroe	EABL	108	90	57
	CAWR	10	10	10
7. Hodges Garden Trail, Florien	EABL	141	95	95
8. Ricky & Cathy Cooper Oak Ridge	EABL	4	4	4
9. Judy Betz Many	EABL	17	16	16
10. Evelyn Cooper Delhi	EABL	190	150	138
	CACH	11	10	10
11. Alethea Brown Mandeville	EABL	9	7	7
12. Jimmie Orr Oak Grove	EABL	10	6	6
13. James Dean Marion	EABL	2,154	1,961	690
	CAWR	125	115	52
	CACH	330	300	160
	WODU	15	15	15
14. Lee Mangano Pearl River	CAWR	2	4	4
15. Evelyn Cooper Poverty Pt. State Park, Delhi	EABL	26	22	21

Con't on pg 9

*Alpha Codes on pg. 9

PLANTING FOR THE BIRDS

By Yvonne Bordelon, Covington, LA

The cooler temperatures of fall and winter make October through March the best time to plant trees, shrubs and vines that will provide food and cover for wildlife. Native plants are preferred for a number of reasons: (1) Wildlife is already accustomed to the fruit, nuts and seeds that native plants provide. (2) These plants are already acclimated to the area making them low maintenance additions to the landscape. (3) Natives do not require additional water (except to get them started), nor fertilizer or pesticides / chemicals. So using native plants saves maintenance time, money and water. (4) Replacing expensive and labor intensive exotic turf grass lawns with food and native plants will benefit humans, wildlife and the environment because the reduced maintenance also saves gasoline and limits the need for lawnmowers, string trimmers and leaf blowers which contribute to air and noise pollution.

When planting trees, shrubs and vines try to select varieties that are multi-functional. For example, a Black Cherry tree will provide shade and beautiful bark and wood as well as fruit to make jelly (or Cherry Bounce if you have a recipe). The sour black fruit is relished by many species of birds and the leaves are eaten by Tiger Swallowtail butterfly larvae. Here are some of our favorite native trees, shrubs and vines for birds and humans.

Trees -Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) - Large deciduous native, early summer fruit, full sun/partial shade. Larval food of the tiger swallowtail butterfly. Attracts 30 bird species (bluebird favorite). Fruit makes good jelly and "Cherry Bounce" liqueur.

Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*) - Large deciduous native, spring fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 29 bird species (bluebird favorite) The berries also make great jam and/or jelly.

Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) - Medium/large deciduous native, fall fruit, full sun/light shade. Beautiful fall color and is hurricane resistant. Attracts 16 bird species.

Southern Crab Apple (*Malus angustifolia*) - Small deciduous native, fall fruits, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 15 bird species and many mammals and makes great jelly.

Dogwood

Flowering (*Cornus florida*) Medium deciduous native, fall fruit, sun/shade.

Rough-leaf (*Cornus drummondii*) Small deciduous native, early summer fruit, sun/partial shade. Larval food of spring azure butterfly. Attracts 15 bird species (bluebird favorite).

Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) - Small deciduous native, late spring fruit, full sun/light shade. Larval food of the spicebush swallowtail butterfly. Fall leaves are dried to make file' to put in gumbo. Attracts 14 bird species.

Service Berry (*Amelanchier arborea*) - Small deciduous native, spring fruit, sun/partial shade. Attracts 14 bird species (bluebird favorite).

Magnolia - Southern (*Magnolia grandiflora*) - Large evergreen native, late summer-fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Sweetbay (*Magnolia virginiana*) - Medium/large evergreen native, July-October fruit, full sun/partial shade. Larval food of the tiger swallowtail butterfly. Attracts 13 bird species.

American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) - Large deciduous native, fall nut-like fruit (Beech nut), medium sun to shade. Attracts 10 bird species.

Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*) - Small deciduous native, summer-fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 9 bird species.

Hackberry, Sugar Berry (*Celtis laevigata*) - Large deciduous native with sweet, small fall fruit, full sun / partial shade. Attracts 10 bird species (including Bluebirds) and many mammals. Host plant for the Snout-nosed (Hackberry) and Question Mark Butterflies

Shrubs, Vines and Small Trees -

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) - Large, semi-evergreen shrub, summer- fall fruit, full sun/light shade. Attracts 31 bird species (bluebird favorite). Blooms make good fritters & fruit makes wine & jelly.

Blackberry and Dewberry (*Rubus spp.*) - Deciduous thorny brambles, late spring fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 31 bird species (bluebird favorite). Human Food, great jelly, too.

Grapes, Muscadines (*Vitis spp.*) - Large deciduous native vines, late summer-fall fruit, full sun/shade. Attracts 28 Bird species. Human food, great jelly.

Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) - Deciduous vine, summer fruit, full sun/shade. Attracts 24 bird species (bluebird favorite).

Southern Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*) - Small evergreen native, early fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Larval food of the red-banded hair-streak butterfly. Attracts 22 bird species.

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) - Large perennial herb, summer-fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 20 bird species (bluebird favorite)

Huckleberry (*Gaylussacia spp.*) / **Blueberries** (*Vaccinium spp.*) - Most are large semi-evergreen native shrubs, spring fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 21 bird species (bluebird favorite). Human food, better than cultivated blueberries.

- Hollies** - American (*Ilex opaca*) - Medium evergreen native tree, fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) Large evergreen native shrub, fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. Attracts 18 bird species (bluebird favorite).
- Greenbriars, Sawbriars** (*Smilax spp.*) - Evergreen or deciduous native vine, late summer-fall fruit, sun/shade. Attracts 40 bird species.
- Arrow-wood** (*Virburnum dentatum*) - Large deciduous native shrub, late summer fruit, full sun/partial shade. Larval food of the spring azure butterfly. Attracts 12 bird species (bluebird favorite).
- Hawthorne - Parsley** (*Crataegus Marshallii*) Large deciduous native shrub, fall fruit, full sun/partial shade. **Mayhaw** (*C. opaca*) Small deciduous native tree, Spring Fruit, full sun/partial shade. Great for jelly. Attracts 12 bird species (thrush family favorite).

Yvonne Bordelon, Covington

LBBS Board Member

Master Gardner

Check out Yvonne's website at:

<http://bellsouthpwp2.net/y/l/ybordelon/index.htm>

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS

Keep records. Keeping records and monitoring is one of the best ways to learn about cavity nesters. By checking the boxes, you come across problems and learn how to deal with them. You also learn many things from their behavior which is a great teacher. You can figure how many babies fledged from the eggs that was laid and the number fledged and that is your fledging rate. By making notes when you check the boxes, you know if it was a predator or if the babies died of some other cause. Many times, we can do something to remedy the loss if it is caused by predation or poorly constructed houses that let the elements in causing hypothermia or un-greased poles ants can climb and cause abandonment of eggs or kill young.

MONITOR	SPECIES	EGGS	HATCH	FLEDGE
16. Kenny Baton Rouge				
Highland	EABL	28	18	18
	CACH	7	7	7
Woods Trail Kleinpeter Farm	EABL	48	23	21
	CACH	15	14	13
	CAWR	49	47	46
	PROW	14	10	10
Kleinpeter Dairy Farm Trail	EABL	456	297	254
	CACH	17	10	8
	CAWR	12	9	9
17. John Tidwell Leo Terza Trail Monroe				
17. John Tidwell Leo Terza Trail Monroe	EABL	148	89	89
	CACH	5	5	5
TOTALS	EABL	3,423	2,846	1,464
	CACH	390	351	208
	CAWR	204	189	115
	PROW	14	10	10
	BRNH	6	6	6
	HOSP	6	0	0
	WODU	15	15	15

*EABL=Eastern Bluebird; BHNU=Brown-headed Nuthatch; CAWR=Caroline Wren; CACH= Carolina Chickadee; HOSP=House Sparrow; WODU= Wood Duck