

BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

Volume 26

Evelyn M. Cooper, Editor

September 2008

An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society



Photo by: Wendell Long
Waynesville, OH

From The Perch
By:
Kenny Kleinpeter
President



It's hot and getting hotter as I write this in late July. The third cycle is in high gear down here in South LA and the drama, oddities and bittersweet struggles of that last-ditch effort by our blues is a fitting way to end the nesting season. The other day, I saw my first double-clutch (two females laying four-egg clutches in one box). Unfortunately, it ended in failure with some of the eggs pinned, I think by one of the females—not the normal conspirator, the house sparrow. The third cycle is more a catch-up or make-up cycle to me but—who knows! The more we learn about these most adaptive birds, the less we realize that we know.

This season, I found myself unable to make weekly checks on my three trails of 8, 50 and 150 boxes. The checks ran about every three to four weeks. I tried to turn this unfortunate situation into a test of sorts to get an idea of what the consequences of inadequate monitoring on a trail's productivity. Obviously, the biggest detriment is the lack of data on the various causes of nesting failures. Much like a crime scene, the quicker one is able to look for evidence, the more one finds. Even the tale-tale signs of a fledged nest disappear in just a week or two so that it becomes difficult to distinguish an unused, complete nest from one that may have fledged one or two young. As I collected data, I found myself having to make assumptions about the various benchmarks or rates that determine productivity: clutch sizes, hatch rates, fledge rates all had to be assumed at times. With this management confession, I come away with a stronger conviction that proper management of a

nestbox includes at least once-per-week monitoring. Anything less makes discovery of problems and timely reaction to the problems that much more difficult. I promise to do better in the future.

My tenure as president is fast coming to an end. With the September annual meeting in Monroe, we will have new leadership to guide this wonderful organization. The last two years have been a great opportunity for me to step outside of my local conditions and demands of bluebirding and appreciate the challenges of other parts of the state. Differences in the northern and southern pressures like the black bear and various larger snakes demand that we adopt different standards of protection and constantly "think outside the box." Real nature is dynamic and constantly adjusting to pressures in the need for all wildlife to eat or be eaten. Bluebirding constantly reminds us of the delicate dance of life and death and our part in influencing that balance.

As this nesting season and my official duty as president winds down, I'm reminded of the great team effort of so many LBBS members and other associated organizations that help us achieve our mission. I look forward to continuing to serve LBBS and encourage anyone who can, to contact any board member for opportunities to do the same. Bluebirding will always be an easy but effective gateway into the wonderful world of wildlife conservation that means so much to Louisiana!

Kenny



Black Bayou Conservation Learning Center, Monroe, Louisiana

LBBS ANNUAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 20, 2008

LBBS 2008 ANNUAL MEETING

Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society will hold its annual meeting at Black Bayou Wildlife Refuge Learning Center, Monroe, Louisiana on September 20, 2008. The meeting will begin with registration and social hour at 9:30 A.M. and adjourn at 1:00 P.M.

Following a brief business meeting, Certificates of Appreciation and award for the “Bluebirder of The Year” will be presented.

LBBS members **Mildred Hyde** and **Tom Allen** will give us show us some important things about monitoring. Mildred will show us what a well equipped monitor carries. Tom will demonstrate the value of using inbox and ground traps and the Sparrow Spooker.

Dr. Samuel Scurria, Delhi, will be the keynote speaker and his program includes how to build a proper box, predator guards, monitoring and even some surprises.

Nice door prizes will be given which will include complete units, nest box and predator guards and a set of Nikon binoculars.

You can register now for the Nikon binocular set and must be present to win. Contact information is LBBS, 1222 Cook Road, Delhi, LA 71232, or e-mail emcooper@bayou.com or call 318-878-3210. There is no charge for registration.

Bring your family or a friend (or both!) and let’s have a great turnout for our meeting!

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Historian: Christy LeGuin

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REMINDER

Please be reminded that membership dues are payable in September. You will receive a renewal form if you are not paid past 2008. Please take the time to fill out the form. An LBBS addressed envelope is included. Please be informed that the P.O. Box is no longer in use.

Thanks to all for supporting LBBS and helping the propagation of the Eastern Bluebird and all native cavity nesters!



Photo by: Janelle Swearingen, Bixby, OK

2008-2010 SLATE OF OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

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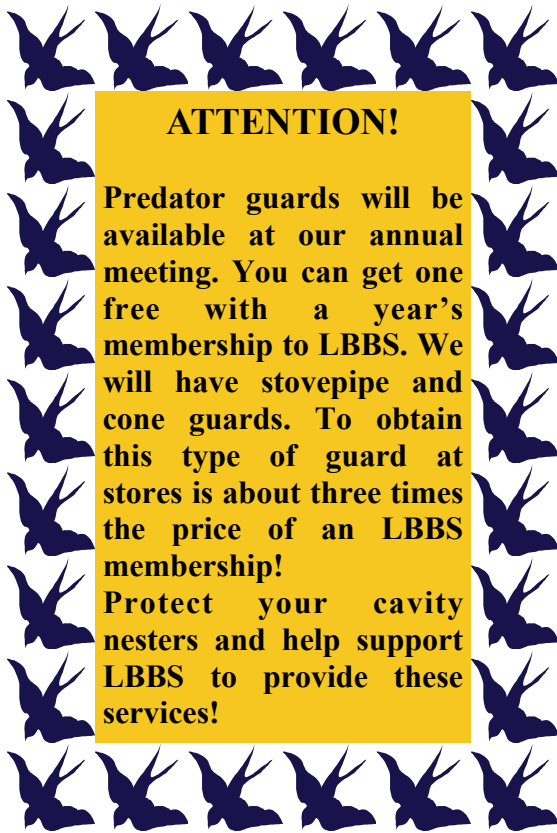
Alethea Brown, Mandeville

Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS

Two females laid these 8 eggs in Janelle Swearingen's nest box in Bixby, OK. The female that made the nest laid the first five the last week of May and then another female appeared on the scene and dumped three eggs.

You can read an account of the event at : <http://www.purplemartin.com/RTC/index.php>

There are "Bluebird Conferences" on the Purple Martin Round Table Conference and one of them is the LBBS Bluebird Conference. You can register with a user name and password and join in the conversation or you can read. It is growing and we are excited about it! Tune in, you'll like it!



Birds Prefer Successful Cavities—If They Are Clean

By: Mark T. Stanback and Anne A. Ford
Journal of the North Americal Bluebird Society
Spring 2002, Vol. 24, No. 2

In recent decades, a contentious discussion has taken place in the literature as a result of two opposing assumptions about nest-site reuse—that birds either prefer or avoid used cavities.

Birds may prefer to reuse successful cavities either because construction of a new nest may constitute a significant time and energy cost, because successful cavities are more valuable than untested sites, or simply because suitable nest cavities are rare. Indeed, a variety of avian species have been shown to exhibit a preference for soiled nests or at least lack of aversion to them. Conversely, birds may avoid used nests due to the ectoparasites they contain. Both observational and experimental research has demonstrated that nest ectoparasites can reduce reproductive success.

Not surprisingly, some birds have been shown sensitive to costs associated with parasites. Some species have been shown to discriminate between high and

low infestation levels in used nests and choose accordingly.

The results suggest that secondary cavity nesters raising more than one brood per season should take steps to minimize parasitism costs associated with being multibrooded. To assess relative importance of nest success versus presence of soiled nests in the nest-site reuse decisions of Eastern Bluebirds, we performed a controlled experiment addressing those two conflicting variables simultaneously.

We manipulated nest box choices in Eastern Bluebirds to assess first whether the presence of a previously used (and presumably parasite-ridden) nest cavity increases or decreases the likelihood of within-season nest-box reuse. Second, we wanted to determine whether birds prefer previously successful cavities.

One hundred pairs of identical bluebird nest boxes were erected in suitable habitat near Davidson, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The box pairs consisted of two Schwegler woodcrete boxes. Woodcrete is a mixture of sawdust and cement. All box pairs were pole-mounted four feet apart, 60 inches above ground level, and both boxes within each pair faced the same direction.

Between breeding seasons every box was cleaned. Consequently, at the beginning of each breeding season, bluebird pairs at a particular location were choosing between two identical clean boxes for their first nesting. We considered a nest box chosen when at least one egg was laid in it and a nesting successful if it fledged at least one chick. We omitted renests following failures from our analyses because bluebirds and other species are more likely to change breeding sites if the previous attempt fails.

After the first nesting, we randomly assigned box pairs containing a successful box to one of two treatments. For half of those box pairs, we removed all old nest material (and presumably most of the active parasites) from the used box within one week of the first brood's fledging. Those experimental boxes are hereafter referred to as cleaned. The clean unused boxes in those experimental pairs are hereinafter referred to as unused. For control box pairs, the boxes were visited, but the old nests were not removed. These boxes are hereinafter referred to as soiled and the alternative boxes, unused. Subsequent nesting choices in both experimental and control pairs were then recorded.

When adults were forced to choose between a soiled but successful nest box and unused nest site of equal quality, 71 percent of bluebirds chose to move to the unused box (of 45 pairs, 32 pairs switched to the unused box; 13 reused the soiled nest).

Thus given a choice between a soiled and an unused box, bluebirds chose the unused but parasite-free cavity significantly more often. Together, these results suggest three things:

- Bluebirds recognize a cost of within-season nest reuse and are willing to switch nest sites to minimize parasitism.
- Bluebirds prefer successful cavities, but only if they are clean.
- In our population, in which cost of nest switching was minimized, the aversion to parasites was stronger than the preference for successful cavities.

Under natural conditions, re-nesting bluebirds have limited options. Alternate cavities may be scarce, distant, defended, suboptimal, of unknown quality, or themselves soiled. If ectoparasitism costs are typically less than the costs of within-season nest-site changes, one might expect nest-site-limited species to reuse successful nest sites, regardless of their cleanliness. Such a rule of thumb is not apparent in our population.

If costs of parasitism typically outweigh costs of nest-site switching, one might expect bluebirds to avoid recently used cavities, regardless of their cleanliness. Again, we find no evidence of such a rule of thumb. Instead, bluebirds made situation dependent assessments. Given a choice between a soiled and an unused box, bluebirds were very willing to switch to an "untested", but parasite-free cavity located in the immediate vicinity. Presented with a cleaned successful box and an identical unused one, bluebirds opted to reuse the former.

Faced with a novel situation, specifically a clean successful cavity, bluebirds responded apparently optimally. However, the generality of our results may be limited to within-season nest-site reuse in secondary cavity nesters. Despite recent interest in effects of parasites, little effort has been made in the literature to distinguish within-verses between-season nest-site reuse. In fact, with the exception of Gowaty and Plissner (1997), most published studies of nest-site reuse focus on between-season patterns. With respect to ectoparasites, those two types of nest reuse are very different.

First, within a season, there is a much greater probability that both members of the pair are present and cognizant of the parasite loads within a particular successful nest cavity. Second, the parasitic species that take advantage of sequential nests within a season often differ from those that overwinter in nest cavities. That may explain why our results differ from those of Davis et al (1994) in which Eastern Bluebirds breeding in Kentucky showed a significant preference for boxes containing successful nests from the prior year.

Perhaps the number and variety of ectoparasites that overwinter in bluebird nests is low enough that the success-signaling function of nests from the previous year out-weighs the parasitism costs of their reuse.

By providing all bluebird pairs with an alternative nest site in the immediate vicinity (four feet away), our study controlled for the potentially confounding variables of nest-site quality and availability. Our results indicate that bluebirds operate under two conflicting rules of thumb ("reuse successful cavities: and "avoid soiled cavities") These in turn are the basis of the two conflicting hypotheses found in the literature concerning nest-site reuse. In our study, aversion to parasites out-weighed preference for successful cavities. However, it would be inappropriate to conclude that avoidance of parasites will always outweigh the preference for successful cavities. We purposefully minimized cost of nest-site switching by providing two boxes side by side. Gowaty and Plissner's (1997) data clearly demonstrate that by altering the cost of nest-site switching (breeding dispersal), one can later the nest-site choice eventually made by the birds. Indeed, if the quality of alternate cavities is low enough, one would expect birds to preferentially reuse soiled cavities. Nest-site preferences are thus best considered to relative rather than absolute.

By: Mark T. Stanback and Anne A. Ford
Journal of the
NABS Spring issue Volume 24. No. 2.

One of the most helpful hints I found when cleaning out dirty nests and boxes, is to carry a bottle of mild Clorox and water solution and spray the nest thoroughly before removing. This keeps down all the flying debris and is much easier to remove. You can spray the box after removing the dirty nest and let sit a few minutes. Then, take a brush and scrub and then rinse thoroughly. I prefer to take my boxes off the pole and take them to where I have a hose with a nozzle and can put it on the ground and clean it without having to have my face so close to the box.. Wear a mask and disposable gloves when cleaning boxes. Clean boxes out at end of nesting season, some are used for roosting! *TAKE PRECAUTIONS!*

SURVEY OF INFECTIOUS AGENTS IN A POPULATION OF EASTERN BLUEBIRDS

Renee E. Carlton, DVM, PhD Candidate Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia Carleton@uga.edu from Bluebird (NABS) Winter 2007-8

To better comprehend the dynamics of any population, an understanding of diseases and environmental factors influencing disease prevalence is necessary. An investigation of such factors affecting Eastern Bluebirds is timely and has implications for conservation and habitat management. In order to investigate the role of infectious agents in bluebird population regulation, identification of parasites and pathogens present within a population and estimation of prevalence (number infected per number examined) is required as a first step. Eastern Bluebirds from a population in northwest Georgia were surveyed for viruses, bacteria, blood parasites, tissue encysted protozoa, intestinal worms, and ectoparasites by physical examination, examination of blood and feces, culture of the oral cavity and vent, and necropsy. Recently fledged nests were also examined for nest parasites.

Two blood parasites, *Haemoproteus fallisi* and *Trypanosoma avium*, were detected at a prevalence of 59% and 3.2% respectively. One of 14 birds (7.1%) tested positive for West Nile Virus. Forty-two bacterial species, including potential pathogens, were cultured from 36 birds sampled. Parasites detected in fecal samples included spiny-headed worms. (*Plagiorhyncus cylindraceus*, 4.1%), Capillaria nematode worms (3.1%) and one unidentified species of intestinal coccidian (4.0%). Three of 16 birds (18.7%) examined during necropsy harbored *Sarcocystis falcatula*, a tissue encysted protozoa. Spiny-headed worms (37.5%), an unidentified tapeworm (6.2%) and a nematode worm (*Capillaria sp.*, 12.5%) and hippoboscid flies (22.5%). Nearly all adults (99%) carried up to three species of non-parasitic feather ites, including one newly discovered species. Ninety-three percent of nests examined harbored blood-sucking mites (*Dermanyssus prognepphilus*). In general, prevalence of parasites infecting the bluebird population studied here was low.

Gary Lelliott, Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society Director, B.C. writes: "I know that I will now be carrying bacterial soap with me to wash my hands after banding birds and also a mask to wear when cleaning out the boxes."

Article taken from "The Nestbox"

The Newsletter of the Southern Interior Bluebird Trail Society
Issue 26, Spring 2008

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Sara Pardue, West Monroe, for displaying Eastern Bluebird nest and eggs at Claiborne Elementary 4th grade. Sara teaches at this school

Marilynn Lewis, Ruston, for her presentation to the Methodist Children's Home in Ruston. Marilynn included Barbara Helms' FL, story of the "Blue Angel" in our December newsletter.

Tom Allen, Oak Ridge for his program to the Pierian Club of Oak Ridge

Alethea Brown, Mandeville, for a presentation to the summer camp at Trinity Episcopal in Baton Rouge with approximately 85 children attending.



Nest cams are a wonderful learning tool besides being so enjoyable. This box is in my backyard. You can see that one half of the egg shell had encapsulated the egg not hatched. The babies kept wiggling and moving their little wings along side it. Mama Blue moved the egg. If finally came off and she ate it. The black screen on the sides is solar screen for heat shields. Nest cams are inexpensive! It is on of my favorite Christmas toys! Evelyn

Papa Blue's Father's Day Gift

In the picture above is three of Papa Blue's babies born June 15th, Father's Day. This is in the box in my backyard with the nest cam. Our children were here and they got to see the eggs hatching. It was a first for them and they were in awe!

I have learned some things on the first cycle I didn't know. The female eats the fecal sacs the first week after babies are hatched.. She also ate the egg shells. I knew they did, but she ate everyone of them as they hatched.

The female does a little procedure called "tremble-thrusting". She sticks her beak down in the nest beside eggs or babies and then she nearly stands on her head and shakes vigorously. She is getting any insects that have come in and also loosening the nest some so the fine grit material will fall below.

On the second cycle, I saw the female (a different one as the first one disappeared four days before the babies fledged) put a huge grub worm in a baby's mouth and it could not swallow it. She pulled it out and then put it back. It could not swallow. I went out to the box in a hurry, but the baby had spit it out.

Papa Blue's first bride was possessed with her reflection in mirrors and windows. Apparently, she was killed as Papa Blue was the only one feeding four days until they fledged. You can read about it on our new LBBS Conferences at:
<http://www.purplemartins.com/RTC/index.php>.