

BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

Volume 31 Evelyn M. Cooper, Editor

December 2009



MARGARET KEMP, MANY, LA “LBBS BLUEBIRDER OF THE YEAR, 2009”

The Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society held its annual meeting on September 19, 2009 at the LSU Museum of Natural Science, Baton Rouge, LA.

The meeting began with registration and social hour at 9:30. Those in attendance were: Ed and Mary Jane Shearer, Tucker, GA, Mildred Hyde, Monroe, Jack and Deb Hoover, West Monroe, Tom Allen, Molly and Mary Kyle, and Riley Bridge, Oak Ridge, Cheryl Gaspard, Maurice, Carolyn and Randy Martin and Margaret and Hill Kemp, Many, Alethea Brown, Mandeville, Ellie and Chuck Lemoine and Nan and Fred Himel, Lake Charles, Sheryl Bassi, Leland, MS, Evelyn Cooper, Delhi, Joe Herring, Kenny Kleinpeter and Jackie Creaghan, Baton Rouge. Following the social hour, a “Behind the Scenes” tour was conducted by Dr. Fred Sheldon, Museum Director. LBBS members and guests were privileged to view many wonderful species of cavity nesters and other species.

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From The Perch
 By:
 Evelyn Cooper
 President

Photo By:
 Wendell Long
 Waynesville, OH

Another nesting season has come and gone. For me, it has been the most unusual of all seasons. I watched on the nest box cam as one female came in and took the nest from the resident female and covered her four eggs, winning the battle. A third female came in bringing grass and these two females shared the laying of nine eggs. After both spent the first night of incubation in the box together, the one that looked to be the youngest disappeared and never returned.

On another part of my trail, I had two different females laying clutches of white eggs this year. Last year, one female laid two clutches and it seems she was the one to come to the same box and laid two clutches this year. However, in the second box that had white eggs, on the second cycle all the eggs were blue, so that means a different female took the box and laid her eggs.

I had four clutches of six clutch eggs this year, the most I've ever had.

The weather was so strange that the second cycle was the hottest this year yielding more infertile eggs on that cycle. That usually happens on the third cycle. August was much cooler with a better hatch and fledge rate. I did have August fledges.

Our Annual Meeting was terrific. We had a good attendance and the speakers did an outstanding job. The "Behind The Scene's" tours were enjoyed by all attending. A special thanks to Tom Allen, Oak Ridge and Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge for giving us such great presentations.



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www.labayoubluebirdsociety.org

ATTENTION:

For those without computers, send Nesting Summaries and please mail to me the species, number of eggs laid, babies hatched and babies fledged. Mail it to me at 1222 Cook Road, Delhi, LA 71232.

THANKS!

Evelyn

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After a brief business meeting, at which time incoming board members Alethea Brown, Mandeville, Madeline Rogers, Baton Rouge, and Sylvia Kidder, Many, were elected, President Evelyn Cooper gave the President's Report on LBBS activities for 2009. Certificates of Appreciation were awarded to Alethea Brown, Mandeville, and Alton Puckett, Lake Charles, for their outstanding service and support to LBBS.

Margaret Kemp, Many, was named "Bluebirder of The Year". Margaret is in charge of monitoring the Hodges Garden Bluebird Trail and has enlisted the help of several LBBS members. She worked with the PALS group at the Zwolle Elementary School that made bluebird boxes and presented them to LBBS. The boxes were given free with the purchase of an LBBS membership and this project brought in 25 members. Margaret also serves as an officer of LBBS and is very deserving of the honor of "Bluebirder of The Year" for 2009.

Tom Allen, Oak Ridge, gave an outstanding presentation on how to deal with House Sparrow predation. The House Sparrow is not a true sparrow, but is a non-native weaver finch, and is one of the worst predators on a Bluebird Trail. Keynote speaker, Kenny Kleinpeter's excellent presentation "Keeping Records, Is It Worth It?" gave everyone an understanding of how important accurate recordkeeping is and how it can benefit the birds we are trying to help.

Door prizes were awarded and the meeting adjourned.

Shown at right: Tom Allen, Oak Ridge demonstrating the inbox trap to members and guests. He also explained the Sparrow Spooker shown on top of the nest box.



Shown above are Mary Kyle and Molly Allen and Riley Bridges. They seemed to be having a good time at the meeting and we certainly enjoyed having them. Molly and Mary Kyle supported their Dad, Tom Allen as he gave his presentation on aggressive House Sparrow control.



Deb Hoover, left, West Monroe, registers for the annual meeting. Mildred Hyde, right, Monroe presided at the registration table.





Alethea Brown, Mandeville, accepts her Certificate of Appreciation for all her support, hard work and generosity to LBBS.

Below: Kenny gave a wonderful presentation showing his record keeping of his monitoring trips. Each species was highlighted in a color to compliment it.



Nan Himel, Lake Charles Garden Club President accepts Alton Puckett's (also of Lake Charles) Certificate of Appreciation. Alton was unable to attend the meeting. Nan told everyone how Alton had helped her and her organization to become involved with bluebirding and LBBS.



The group getting a "Behind the Scenes" tour with Dr. Fred Sheldon, Director of the LSU Museum of Natural Science. Comments included "fantastic, worth seeing again, and it was great!"

DO NO HARM
By: Bet Zimmerman, Certified Environmentalist
Woodstock, CT
www.sialis.org

Hippocrates was a Greek physician born around 460/470 B.C. He is associated with training, ethics and professional ideals. One of his Aphorisms was: "Life is short, and the Art long; the occasion fleeting; experience fallacious, and judgment difficult." He counseled those who wished to become competent in medicine to reflect and learn, and "bring to the task a love of labor and perseverance, so that the instruction taking root may bring forth proper and abundant fruits...diligent study is like the cultivation of the fields, and it is time which imparts strength to all things and brings them to maturity."

These words are very relevant to the Art of blue birding. Often it is hard, if not impossible, to know what the "right thing to do" is. As a bluebird host, I confess I have made many mistakes. A few of these mistakes have resulted in abandoned nests, broken eggs, dead nestlings and dead adult native birds.

Some of my mistakes were a result of something I actively did, like dropping a Gilbertson box during monitoring which resulting in eggs breaking. Others were a result of something I failed to do, like prevent paper wasps from causing parents to abandon a clutch of eggs about to hatch. Some of these losses were due to my inexperience, some to experimentation, others to bad judgment.

Inexperience: I read as much as I can, and ask questions, hoping to learn from others. I also try to learn something from my own near misses or mistakes so I do not commit them again. As painful as it is, I try to share those lessons learned with others, so THEY do not have to find out the hard way.

Experimentation: When conducting experiments, we must make our best efforts, based on available information and good

For example, somebody tried putting Plexiglas roofs on a nest box, in an attempt to deter House Sparrows. The heat cooked the eggs. There is no need to repeat an experiment like that. This is why I encourage people to report not just on successful experiments, but failed ones also.

There are other occasions where well planned, responsible, ethical and legal experiments are conducted that result in losses - sometimes very painful ones. However, in the end, the work contributes considerably to our knowledge base. Thus, in the long run, it is beneficial and worthwhile in that, if the information is shared, it may improve nesting success in the future for many other native cavity nesters.

Bad Judgment/Carelessness/ Ignorance: Sometimes in an attempt to help, despite our good intentions, we can end up doing more harm than good. This usually happens from micromanagement, interference, or carelessness. Examples include checking a box so often during nest building that nervous Titmice abandon it, putting food on top of or inside of a nest box which attracts predators/attacks by nest box competitors, removing a nest you think is abandoned when it is not, rushing, or not keeping good track of nestling ages and causing premature fledging, or failure to monitor an inbox trap hourly resulting in the death of a native bird.

I understand that nature can be cruel. We cannot prevent bad weather or rid the world of predators. I accept some losses as a result of natural processes. They may result in the evolution of a stronger breed or more experienced parents.

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DO NO HARM

We also can not control what other people do (like letting House Sparrows breed). But we can try to educate them, so at least they will make informed choices.

If we do nothing, we probably won't make as many mistakes. We also won't learn, and probably won't help many birds.

I figure the world outside the nest box is tough enough - if we can help the young of native birds make it that far, it may make a difference. What I find most difficult is forgiving myself when things go badly as a result of a fault of my own.

We put up nest boxes in the hopes of helping native birds procreate. I pray that the good we do as a bluebird monitors offsets our failures. Maybe they haunt us so we will do everything in our power to avoid repeating them, or feel compelled to help others.

One thing I THINK I know for sure - giving up when things go wrong is not the answer.

More information:

Books

Advice for new bluebirders

Bluebirding Blues: The Downside

Why and How to Monitor Nest Boxes

House Sparrow Advisory - neighbors | businesses

Research needs

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

...make a habit of two things - to help, or at least do no harm

..... attributed to Hippocrates (a Greek physician), The Epidemics, Bk1, Sec.XI

Editor's Note: Bet is one of the most dedicated monitors of native cavity nesting birds you will ever find. Her wonderful website is www.sialis.org. Check it out!



Shown above is the pair of Bluebirds that my friend, Richard Harlow, of Milton, VT waited for since 2001! They came this year and it was middle of August when they started nesting which is very late. He had September Bluebird fledglings. (would be unusual for LA too)

Richard had some cavity nesters during the years he waited for his Bluebirds. He had Black-capped Chickadees, Tree Swallows and a Great-crested Fly-Catcher. He also had a family of Red Squirrels to nest in one box.

Congratulations to Richard and most of all for his patience. He is now a true, blue, bluebirder!



Fall is a great time to put up those nest boxes in your yards and to establish a trail. This box sits in my front yard and I am seeing a pair the first week of November checking it out.

Remember to place the guard up just as close as you can get it to the bottom of the nest box. If you have heavy snake traffic, the stove pipe is considered the best. It will keep the other climbing predators off too. The cone guard is effective in keeping most all of the climbing predators off, but the snake can get past it more easily than the stovepipe guard. Some snakes can actually stand on their tails and are high enough to attach themselves to the seam of the stovepipe or to the pole the cone guard is on and get past it to the nest box..

This year, I actually witnessed a snake going in a nest box where I know he had to have climbed the guy wire that was too close to the unit and got to the box. He devoured five bluebird eggs. The guard was made from 8" PVC pipe, so I know the snake didn't climb a seam. Also, there was no sign that he crossed the grease anywhere beneath the guard. (Another reason to grease the pole) Funny thing, the Bluebirds had a group of Starlings to join them in dive-bombing the box. I could hardly believe my eyes, but I saw it happened!

Nest boxes that have been out for a few years will soon have some gaps in the seams and these can be filled with a clear caulking sealer than you can smooth out with your fingers.

Another tip is to make sure the entry hole is very smooth so there is no wear and tear on the birds' feathers. I use fine sandpaper and touch up every box that we give with a membership if it needs it.

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

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