

# BAYOU BLUEBIRD NEST NEWS

Volume 33 Evelyn M. Cooper, Editor

June 2010

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## THE SPARROW SPOOKER



Many bluebirders think the Sparrow Spooker is the neatest thing since sliced bread! The one in the left picture is a store bought one, the one in the right picture is a home made spooker.

*Specific* instructions should be followed for it to be effective. The Spooker is put on *AFTER* the first egg is laid. It is left on the box until the babies fledge and then removed until the next egg appears on that cycle. The reason for waiting until after the egg is laid, the female is bonded to the box and accepts the funny looking apparatus on top of her box without abandoning. This tool is not recommended as House Sparrow (HOSP) control alone. It is used in conjunction with other methods such as the inbox trap, ground traps and the trusty rifle, where the rifle can be used. The reason for taking it off after the babies have gone and putting it back on when the next cycle is underway, is so that the undesirable avian predators will not get accustomed to it and harass or destroy birds and eggs.

I used the Spooker last year when I had House Sparrows and Starlings attacking the box and it helped to have it installed immediately until we could get rid of the predators. One of my trails is ten miles from me and when I had HOSP problems there, I installed the Spooker in a hurry (the home made one) that helped until I could trap them. You can buy them online at [www.sparrowtraps.net](http://www.sparrowtraps.net), or you can make one with three small pieces of wood, screws and something shiny. I cut strips from an insulated garbage bag and used thumb tacks to secure it. It kept all the larger annoying birds away for me!

Evelyn



**From The Perch**

By:  
Evelyn Cooper  
President

Photo By:  
Wendell Long  
Waynesville, OH

Nesting season finally got in full swing. It was three weeks late for my part of the state. However, when it started, the boxes were suddenly full of nests and eggs and babies everywhere on my trail and in my yard. I have four nesting pair in my yard, first time ever! Box #21 on my trail which is just above the barn has white eggs again this year. This is the third year and I feel it is the same female since only 5% of Bluebirds lay white eggs.

I would like to say thanks to all our LBBS members that gave presentations to any group or school this last year. Emily Winners, Lecompte gave 11 presentations and James Dean, Marion gave 10. That was outstanding. This information is included in our state and federal annual reports for our Permit to carry nests and eggs.

I also want to thank the Nominating Committee, Margaret Kemp, Many, Chair, Sheryl Bassi, Leland MS and Alethea Brown, Mandeville, for the excellent job with the nomination of slate of officers and board members for the upcoming 2010-2012 term.

Plans are underway for a great annual meeting this year. LBBS is blessed with members that are excellent speakers and have experience monitoring and maintaining bluebird trails. Please mark your calendar for the date and time given and join us for a fun time, an opportunity to hear what works on these trails and connecting with old friends and making new ones.(More info in September newsletter)

If you can bring a door prize, it will be greatly appreciated. Contact me if you can.

Evelyn



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- Sec/Treas: John Tidwell, Monroe**
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- Historian: Christy Cooper, Delhi**

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- Emily Winners, Lecompte**
- Marilynn Lewis, Ruston**
- Carolyn Martin, Many**

[www.labavoubluebirdsociety.org](http://www.labavoubluebirdsociety.org)

**LBBS 2010 ANNUAL MEETING**

**Where: Biedenharn Museum, Education Center, Monroe, LA**

**When: October 23, 2010**

**Time: 9:30 to 1:30**

**Speakers: Mary Jane Shearer, LBBS Board Member, Tucker, GA and James Dean, Marion, LBBS member. Come hear these experienced monitors speak to us about their trails and experiences.**

**SLATE OF OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS TO BE PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 23, 2010:**

President: Margaret Kemp, Many  
1st V/P: Tom Allen, Oak Ridge  
2nd V/P: Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge  
Sec/Treas: John Tidwell, Monroe  
Recording Sec: Evelyn Cooper  
Historian: Alethea Brown

**Incoming Board Members:**

Mary Jane Shearer, Tucker GA  
Mildred Hyde, Monroe  
Carolyn Martin, Many  
Emily Winners, Lecompte  
Dorothy Gammel, Denham Springs  
Marilynn Lewis, Ruston  
Yvonne Bordelon, Covington



Above is the finished product for the cone guard. It is mounted on a tee post.



Cone guards are very popular. If you don't have a lot of snake pressure, especially very long snakes, they can be very effective. This method LBBS uses is very easy to construct. You can put a store bought or home made cone guard on an electrical conduit pole or a tee post. The picture at the left shows conduit bracket fastened to the pole where the cone guard is to rest. The middle picture shows a tennis ball cut in half and the half used has slits in the top side of it. The ball is pushed down the pole and rests on the bracket. This closes up any holes that may be there when the cone guard is put on the pole and comes to rest on the tennis ball. The metal cone guard in the far right picture is made from sheet metal. It is homemade by Kenny which he painted dark green. You can go online and find these guards or possibly find them at a home and garden store near you. The one I found at [www.woodduckshack.com](http://www.woodduckshack.com) was priced at \$21.00. The finished product you see in the picture above is at Highland Park Bluebird Trail in Baton Rouge where Kenny has monitored and maintained for several years. Large numbers of children frequent the park and we feel it is a safe guard to use in those situations.

**Winter Supplemental Feeding Pays Off**  
**By Paula Ziebarth, Powell, Ohio**  
(Bluebird Body Theory)

For the past 4 years here in Powell, I have had no winter kill Eastern Bluebird (EABL) in my trail boxes in the city. I call them my townie birds. They are overwintering, using boxes for roosting and frequenting my feeders and other peoples feeders. I have reports from six different townie people in my area that EABL frequented their feeders over this past winter. Two trails that are more rural in my area have had some losses in the boxes, however. I found three dead male EABL on a trail near the edge of town that is on a farm. Another trail in close proximity had 3 dead males and one dead female in the boxes. I don't know if ratio of dead males to dead females is generally larger or not, but I wonder whether the males defer to the females to allow them to eat the last vestiges of food out in the woods, knowing nesting season will soon be upon them and hoping to keep the females at good breeding weight so they can carry on the family name. Maybe that is very romantic of me and attributing valiance and gentlemanly qualities to these birds, but I do wonder about it.

The really interesting thing about both these sites is that they have established a large bird feeding station on site this past year, BUT, the EABL have not been coming to the feeders at all. I spoke with the two people today at both locations who stock and observe the feeders and they had no EABL visitors this winter there. It is not for lack of trying at the one location as naturalist set out mealworms and suet mixes on platforms and different feeders to try to get them to come in.

This is very interesting to me and I do believe that wild EABL have to be trained to use a feeder or they may have

no idea where they can go to get food when the natural food stores are gone. Training them during winter months would likely be rather difficult. Training them during nesting season is fairly simple and it should only take once to do it (i.e. retraining is not required in subsequent years).

About ten years ago, I trained a pair of EABL in the early spring to use a feeder in my yard. It was relatively easy. I set a shallow plastic lid with mealworms on the ground in front of their nest box. Gradually, I moved the lid closer to the feeder. Finally, I set the lid with worms inside the feeder. They figured it out rather quickly. They taught their young, bringing them to the feeder. Other EABL showed up during the winter months. I imagine they followed the trained ones or there was a friendly conversation of some sort because I had 12 coming into the yard one winter. They transitioned from mealworms to suet mix nicely during winter months too. Other townie people are feeding mealworms to their nesting EABL also and I imagine their young may nest nearby, see a feeder and know what it is. They seem to survive the winter better here and start building their nests earlier too. I have encouraged both people in charge of bird feeding at these two locations to train their pair of nesting EABL closest to the feeding station to eat mealworms out of a feeder this spring. They both seemed excited to try it. My theory is that next winter, if they are successful, they will have no winter kill birds on those trails. It will be very interesting to see if I am right. Today, when I removed that third male EABL from his wooden coffin and felt his keel, I was amazed that he had had the strength to drag himself in there for that last cold winter night. I let the gentleman in charge of feeding the birds there feel his keel and look at those brilliant blue feathers. I think he will be starting a mealworm culture there shortly. Paula Ziebarth, Powell (Central) Ohio

Editor's Note: Feeding in summer months is not necessary. Help on the first cycle is O.K., but birds need the insects!

## FECAL SACS

Why do bluebirds carry sacs from their nests for disposal away from the nest site? Is this good housekeeping or something more? A recent study in Georgia found that Eastern Bluebirds (EABL) behaved as do many other bird species in sac removal. Their behavior is consistent with the hypothesis that fecal sac removal is done to reduce cues predators use to find nests. The published study, *Observations of Fecal Sac Removed by Eastern Bluebirds*, written by Jason D. Gowaty, appeared in the journal *The Condor* (104:205-207).

“ We observed EABS parents place nesting fecal sacs high on electric wires”, the authors wrote. “This stimulated our interest in fecal sac removal, which occurs commonly amount bird species, yet remains a neglected topic in studies of parent behavior. Observations support the explanations that fecal removal keeps nests dry and clean and reduces exposure to pathogens and parasites, but if these were the only reasons parents removed fecal sacs, one might expect parents to drop fecal sacs just outside their cavities. Alternatively, if fecal sacs removal reduces cues predators use, parents should dispose of fecal sacs far from nests.”

The study was conducted from March through August in the years of 1995 through 1999. EABL’s were observed feeding young and removing fecal sacs at 348 nests in 128 territories at four sites near Athens. GA.

“With the exception of balancing fecal sacs high on electric wires, EABL’s seem to behave like other species when removing fecal sacs from nests,” the authors wrote.

“American Crows and Florida Scrub-Jays placed fecal sacs on branches...Prothonotary Warblers carried fecal sacs about 120 ft. to 300 ft. before dropping them and Tree Swallows carried sacs between 60 and 160 feet.”

The study showed that the Bluebirds deposited fecal sacs from 120 to 300 ft. from the nest, flying from 60 to 150 ft. farther on these trips than on trips when no sacs were carried. Bluebirds were observed placing fecal sacs on wires, wooden fence posts,



Female Removing Fecal Sac  
Photo By: Cindy Brown, Lafayette

tree branches, and, once, atop a utility pole. If the sac was dropped during the disposal trip, the bluebirds sometimes carried the sac in mid-flight and continued the disposal effort.

“Bluebirds removed 95 percent of fecal sacs during feeding trips, rather than making special trips for this purpose.....Female and male parents do not differ in removal rates or disposal of fecal sacs”.

“Because adults traveled farther than usual to dispose of fecal sacs, we conclude that the current best explanation for fecal sac removal by adult Eastern Bluebirds is reduction of cues, visual or chemical, that predators might use for finding nests,” the authors wrote.

Article from *Bluebird Journal* of the North American Bluebird Society, Summer 2002, Volume 24, No 3

Editor Evelyn Cooper’s note: I have witnessed Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens placing fecal sacs on the power line in my backyard.

## MY FIRST HOUSE SPARROW EXPERIENCE

Evelyn Cooper

The House Sparrow pair took over a bluebird nest with eggs on the front part of the Poverty Point State Park Trail at Delhi. The Bluebirds moved to another box on the front and started to build and the House Sparrows came and took that box. They moved on following the Bluebirds taking over another box on the front. The bluebirds moved a quarter of a mile to the walking trail and the House Sparrow followed them. They built in the first box on the Walking Trail of the park. This box never had a bluebird in it because the Mockingbird reigned supreme on it. I ordered a Van Ert trap and installed it in a new box there after tearing out the House Sparrow nest. I went about checking the rest of the trail. I drove back up to the box and saw the female about to go in. She and the male were already building back and I had torn the nest out about 15 minutes before. The female House Sparrow finally went in (a Mocker was harassing her) and then she came out. The trap did not go off! Well, that was my lucky break. I left the box and went back up town and when I came, the male had gone in and I caught him. The female did not show up again which is what usually happens when you get their mate.

Two days later, I found a bluebird nest started in the box. After the female laid her first egg, I put the Sparrow Spooker on just in case there might be some more House Sparrows around. This is the first time this box has ever had bluebirds in it. The Sparrow Spooker seemed to be keeping the other birds away from it. I didn't see Ms. Mocker anywhere around and she never showed the rest of the nesting season.

Clayton and I built this Spooker in a big hurry. The only thing I had around the house that was shiny and that I could cut in strips was one of those insulated grocery bags. I stuck some tacks in the strips of the bag I cut on each side of the piece of wood extending over the roof and behind it.

I had read that you could use fewer pieces of strips of shiny dangly materials until the bluebirds get used to it and then add more. You can wrap a couple around the wood that sticks out over the box and secure with a thumb tack. Then, after the female has accepted the Spooker, unwrap the rest of the dangling pieces. I took the Spookers off after the babies fledged and put them back on when the first egg was laid on the next nesting cycle. This experience with one pair of House Sparrows gave me a greater appreciation to those monitors that have to deal with many in numbers.

Below is the picture of the box at the Poverty Point State Park at Delhi where this occurred on the trail I established and monitor.

Evelyn



## COUNTING YOUNG BIRDS IN A NEST

By: Keith Kridler, Mt. Pleasant, TX

There is NOT any real hurry to count the young birds that hatch in a backyard nest box. With the bluebirds you have 13>15 days before their pin feathers start to turn into real feathers and you can sex them by the blue color in the wing feathers on the males. Within a week you can easily count the young birds that survive to this age.

For really young birds you can whistle or squeak with your lips and the young birds that are hungry will open their beaks and beg for food. Then, you can count the open mouths.

During the first couple of days, especially when it is cold the female needs to brood her young to keep them warm. Young, just hatched bluebirds do NOT produce ANY of their own body heat as all of the food they are fed is used to grow bone and tissue. They rely on the excess heat produced by the female to warm them up to about 99°F where their body functions best.

Baby birds basically grow physically as much every 24 hours as compared to a human baby over the course of a year. Humans rapidly grow for about 16>18 years where as young bluebirds are ready to leave the nest in 16>18 days. At around day 14>16 a baby bluebird will actually weigh MORE than their parents.

Those first few days are CRITICAL for the young birds as they need to stay warm and get GREAT amounts of NUTRITIOUS foods in order to develop good bones, muscles and nerve tissue. Right now the early nesting Eastern Bluebird parents in North East Texas ONLY have 13 hours of day light to hunt for food for their young and themselves. It is 39°F this morning so MOST insects will NOT be active this morning so their young will go hungry

until about 10 AM when it warms up!

IF the adults are kept away for even an hour or two during the day because of our human activity or by dogs, cats, or other predators in our backyards, then these young bluebirds will miss out on a WHOLE lot of growth if they are not being fed! Similar to a human baby not being fed at all at night or skip a day of feeding them!!! Watch the weather conditions! It is hard for the adults to hunt and find food because of inclement weather. Skip the monitoring of the boxes in the backyard so as NOT to stress out the adults and keep them from feeding their young.

Adult bluebirds feed or really stuff their young in spurts. An hour or two of rapid feeding trips to the boxes may be followed by an hour of no feeding trips.

**To join the North American Bluebird Society, go to [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org) or call 662-628-1625.**



This backyard box has six eggs. Notice one egg is right on the edge of the nest near the door. When I check, the female does not have it under her while incubating. They usually remove the egg because somehow they know it is infertile.

**LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY**

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