

# Bayou Bluebird Nest News

Editor: Sheryl Bassi September 2003 Volume 6

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*An Affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society*

## East Ascension Sportsmans League Nestbox Program

Keith and friends  
building nestboxes.



EASL's "Bluebird Nestbox Program" had its humble beginnings in 1987 when early that year the Board of Directors considered a proposal by a relatively new member named Keith Saucier. Saucier informed the group of the serious decline in population of this beautiful native bird, and proposed that the organization finance the materials to construct thirty specially designed bluebird nestboxes. The boxes would then be offered for sale to EASL members "at cost" in order to reimburse the club's expenses.

Since Saucier was a relatively unknown newcomer to the organization, and most board members had never even seen nor heard of "Bluebirds", many were skeptical. But longtime board member and mentor, V.J. Bourque convinced that, even though he doubted there were any Eastern Bluebirds left in Ascension Parish, the club didn't really have anything to lose by letting Saucier try his project. The Board agreed. No one realized it at the time, but it was a decision that would launch one of the most popular and successful projects in the club's 50 year history, and would alter the destiny of Eastern Bluebirds in Ascension Parish.

More boxes were built and distributed every year and in 1992, EASL decided to establish its own "bluebird nestbox trail". Two roadside trails were created that criss-crossed the parish following Highways 30 and 73. Combined, they are 20 miles long and have a total of 80 nestboxes.

Now, over a decade later, EASL has build and sold over 1,000 bluebird nestboxes and members are still calling for more. The beautiful little bird had not been seen in our area in decades, and is now a common sight year-round in neighborhoods, yards, and fields in almost every corner of Ascension Parish. An even more common sight are the boxes themselves. Since they were build of cedar and galvanized nails, even the earliest ones are still around, and still producing baby bluebirds. As you drive around, you can see them on roadsides and around people's homes almost everywhere.



ARTICLE BY DEAN SHELDON, PRESIDENT,  
NORTH AMERICAN BLUEBIRD SOCIETY  
Ripley Township, Huron County, OH

If this is your first season of monitoring a bluebird nest box(es), you might want to pay special attention to this information. It comes from one who has been down the trail a time or two and who shares this info out of concern for your safety.

As the nesting season moves along into late July and August (earlier in the South), wasps and hornets (of all kinds) seem to gravitate to bird nest boxes and appurtenances as sites for their nests and brood raising. My guess is that it may be the higher temperatures in/about the boxes that causes this phenomenon.

Accordingly, begin to approach all nest boxes with greater caution at this time of the nesting season. Thoroughly inspect the OUTSIDE of the box...especially *under the box* and *behind the box* and *between the back of the box and its mounting pipe/post*. These are favorite locations for wasp/hornet nests (dark, well hidden). In addition, you must be especially concerned if a pipe is used for the box mounting...they build nests down inside the pipe and will explode out of it if disturbed.

If you use a Kingston (sheet metal) or PVC tubular predator guard, you must be especially vigilant. These potentially harmful insects are very prone to attach their nests up, inside these moveable guards. One bump against the mounting post, the alarm bell goes off, and the attack is swift and certain. Even if these guards are sealed tight to the post at the top, the attack can come from beneath the guard.

As always, open the door/side cautiously. A wasp/hornet build up may have taken place since your last monitoring visit....not only on the sides or the roof, but also in the vacated nesting material. Be very careful when removing used nests at this season...this is a favorite site for what are commonly called "ground bees."

There is, in my opinion, no best time to monitor boxes to avoid disturbing the wasps/hornets or bees. Use good common sense. Approach with caution, and SIZE UP THE SITUATION (inside/out) before beginning your nest box monitoring. If there is an abundance of insect activity and a threatening situation.....walk away and forget that box. You may have to avoid that particular box for the rest of the season and clean it out when cold weather returns. Persons known to be allergic to insect bites or stings probably would be well advised to stay off the trail altogether.

Please plan your bluebird trail work with these cautions in mind. They could make a big difference in the outcome of your trail management.

## Bluebird Tidbits

Not only is it a standard practice to clean out nestboxes after each nesting cycle, it's also a good idea to do some "end-of-season housekeeping". After the final nesting, remove the old nest and wash the interior with a mild bleach solution. Line the bottom with foil and top with a shallow layer of grass or pine needles. This will provide a snug spot for over-wintering bluebirds to roost.

A new method of controlling the climate inside the nestbox during the hot summer months is a solar sunscreen. Cut lengths of solar screening the width of the nestbox. Tack to the bottom edge of the nestbox and bring over the top and down to the opposite bottom edge of the nestbox and secure. Leave enough slack to create an airspace of about one inch at the top. Insert 2 to 3 wood strips approximately 1 inch by 5 inches between the screening and the roof to create an airspace. This will keep the interior of the nestbox much cooler during the long, hot days later in the nesting season.

If you're planning to install new nestboxes, put them up during the autumn. Over-wintering blues will use them for roosting when winter weather arrives.

I'd like to share one of my success stories on fostering baby birds. I am a licensed rehabilitator for songbirds, and I specialize in baby birds. A note of caution, you must be a licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator to foster wildlife.

One day, I received a call to pick up a baby Black-Capped Chickadee from a couple who almost ran over it. The little bird had been sitting in the middle of the road! The couple straddled it with their car to avoid hitting it. When they looked in their rear view mirror, they saw that it was still there. They stopped and picked it up and took it home. They called their local vet who directed them to me. The little bird was a fledgling, meaning it was old enough to leave the nest but not ready to fly very far and feed itself. I had it about a week and fed it mealworms and a special high protein diet for baby birds. He sure was a chubby little fella!

Toward the end of the week, my sister called and said she had a nest of chickadees under a tree in her front yard. It was a hanging nestbox. I checked out the nest and sure enough, there were two baby Chickadees ready to fledge and six infertile eggs! One of the parents flew out as I opened the nestbox. I went back home and waited until about 9:30 p.m. to be sure it was very dark. I took my fledgling over to put him in the box with the other two chickadees and discovered that they had fledged earlier that evening. I put him in the box anyway and waited to see that he stayed. He did.

I went back the next morning hoping to observe my fledgling leaving the box, even though it was 5 a.m. He had already fledged. After whistling for him, I heard his plaintive cry. I knew it was he, because he was about a week older than the other two, and much more feathered out and very plump. When he saw me, he flew to a lower branch that was in front of me and started to flutter his wings and beg to be fed. I was standing under the tree near the nestbox. Both parent chickadees were watching from a distance and immediately became very upset (a good thing). I stood still and just waited and watched, and sure enough an adult came and fed him! At first, he was a little reluctant, but the adult persisted and he finally opened his mouth and ate. I saw one of the other fledglings flutter and fly to hide under a bush under the three.

I was so grateful to the parent chickadees for adopting my fledgling. He will have a greater chance of survival now that he has two siblings and a set of parents!

Kathleen Bennett  
Central NY  
Licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator for Songbirds  
Member North American Bluebird Society  
Member Cornell University Bluebird List

### DELHI THIRD GRADERS TOUR BLUEBIRD TRAIL

On Friday, April 28, 2003, twenty-one Delhi Charter School third-graders, their teacher, Joyce Tolar, and parents, Amy Carson, Jennifer Ogden and Jonellyn Hebert enjoyed a tour of Evelyn Cooper's Bluebird Trail. Mrs. Cooper's trail is located on the grounds of Cooper Farms, near Delhi, La.

Upon arrival at Cooper Farms, the class loaded onto a flatbed trailer pulled by a tractor driven by "Mr. Clayton" Cooper and began the tour around the trail. They saw sleeping babies of all ages, one only a few hours old. They observed nestboxes that were "paired" so that two different species could nest in close proximity. In these particular nestboxes, Carolina Chickadees and Bluebirds were neighbors. Mrs. Cooper explained to the class about predator guards, which help to insure the safety of the baby birds and their parents during the nesting season. Mrs. Cooper taught the class about how the "monitoring" of nestboxes is accomplished, and many other details of the process of helping Bluebirds and other native cavity nesting birds. This was the group's science lesson for the day. The highlight of the tour occurred at one of the nestboxes as the class witnessed both Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird "dive-bomb" Mrs. Cooper as she checked the nestbox. The children let out squeals of delight and there were lots of smiles on the adult's faces as well.

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DELHI THIRD GRADERS TOUR BLUEBIRD TRAIL  
(Continued)

After the tour, the day was concluded with a picnic lunch on blankets spread beneath the sprawling Oak trees on the Cooper's front lawn.

This field trip to the Cooper's Bluebird Trail is part of an ongoing project sponsored by the Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society. LBBS will help in establishing a bluebird trail on the grounds of the Delhi Charter School's new facility this fall, and will be aiding the class in learning to monitor the trail.

The Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society and the Delhi Charter School look forward to helping to increase the population of Louisiana's Native Cavity Nesting Birds.



Mrs. Tolar and the students enjoy a ride along the trail.



3rd graders and Evelyn Cooper peek into a nestbox containing 6 babies.

## *From The Perch...*

It seemed nesting season was over in a blink of an eye for me. There was only one nest for a third cycle and they fledged in mid-July. Maybe they are getting smarter because the heat index reached 112\* several days in August. A third cycle would have been a bummer.

Please complete your Nest Summary Sheet for the year and send it to me if you have not already done so. We will tally the results and publish them.

Our annual meeting promises to be a great one. Calls and e-mails are coming in from people planning to attend. Just a reminder, it is September 20, at 2:00 until 5:00 at Lee Jr. High School, 1600 North 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Monroe, LA.

Let's keep those renewals coming! We want to stay strong in numbers and continue our growth throughout the state. Our enrollment to date is 136 members!

The Nestbox Workshop has been a great boost to our membership and we hope to plan more of them. We desperately need nestbox builders! You can contact your local contractor and he will be glad to give you all the scrap material you need to build them! Contact me if you can help in this.

See you at the meeting!  
Evelyn