

Bayou Bluebird Nest News

Editor: Sheryl Bassi March 2004 Volume 8



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Kenny's Story

How I Got the Blues

By Kenny Kleinpeter, Baton Rouge, LA



I've been a purple martin host for 25 years. For the last several years, I've hosted about 150 pairs of martins. I've always had a special appreciation for cavity nesting birds. In addition to martins, I manage about 10 wood duck boxes and several small boxes for various species such as chickadees, titmouses, finches and wrens.

For years, I've tried but failed to attract bluebirds to my boxes. In late winter, I would

occasionally see a flock as they hawked insects in our neighborhood so I knew they were around. I just couldn't get them to stay.

I finally found out where the blues (as I affectionately call them) were nesting. A neighbor down the street must have had the ideal location, right on the edge of a wooded area because he said they'd been there for years. Since then, I was determined to "steal" his blues.

After joining LBBS, I told my story to Evelyn. The first thing she told me to do was to provide mealworms to the blues when they pass through my area. Next, she encouraged me to move the boxes I had provided off of the various trees and posts and erect them on proper poles, away from the trees, facing the trees (for the fledges first flights) and to install proper guards.

About the middle of February, a pair seemed particularly interested in one of my boxes attached to a willow tree near our lake. I hadn't followed

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any of Evelyn's recommendations, but I thought that maybe it was about time I did. I pulled the box off of the tree and set it on its own pole about ten feet away from the tree. It was enough to send the blues into a frenzy of activity. Miss Evelyn replied to my e-mail with "You got 'em!"

Immediately they started nest building and in a matter of days, a complete nest was fashioned and ready for eggs. Even with hundreds of martins flying all about, my little blues have captured most of my attention. They are so beautiful, so personable. They harm no one but the various ground insects around the area. It's hard to imagine that 30 years ago, they were on the verge of extinction.

I promise to take good care of my blues and report back to the society with the result of this very exciting first nesting season. Thank you LBBS!

Mark your Calendar for the

LBBS Spring Meeting and Nestbox Workshop

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY invites you to a workshop on April 17, 2004, at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, North Oak Hills, Baton Rouge, LA at 10:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. to learn to put together your own nestbox. This will include a membership to LBBS. To register call 318-878-3210 or e-mail emcooper@bayou.com. Limited to 25.

LOUISIANA BAYOU BLUEBIRD SOCIETY invites you to its Spring Event to be held on April 17, 2004 at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, 10503 North Oak Hill Parkway, Baton Rouge, LA at 2:00 until 5:00. Featured Speaker is Beau Gast. Door Prizes will be given.



Beau Gast

Beau Gast, Folsom, LA, is Vice President of Louisiana Wildlife Rehabilitators Association, associated with National Wildlife Rehabbers Association, International Wildlife Association and the Humane Society of the United States. He is a practicing rehabilitator at Clear Water Wildlife Sanctuary, Covington, LA.

LBBS 3rd Annual Meeting

The Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites you to attend the 3rd Annual Meeting on September 4, 2004 at Biedenharn Museum & Gardens,

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2006 Riverside Drive, Monroe, LA at 2:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. Keith Kridler - past Vice President and co-founder of Texas Bluebird Society, past board member of the North American Bluebird Society, co-author of "The Bluebird Monitor's Guide" and bluebird expert - is the guest speaker. The public is invited to attend. Door prizes will be given.

Bluebird Nestbox Workshop

The Louisiana Bayou Bluebird Society invites you to learn to build your own nestbox and receive a membership to the organization. It will be held at Biedenharn Museum & Gardens, 2006 Riverside Drive, Monroe, LA on September 4, 2004 at 10:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. To register call 318-878-3210 or e-mail emcooper@bayou.com. Limited to 25 nestboxes.

WASP ON THE BLUEBIRD TRAIL

BY

KEITH KRIDLER, TEXAS BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

Paper wasps compete with birds for cavities and can be a problem for trail monitors who are allergic to their venom. In the next two months we will start getting a lot of questions about how to deal with these insects that invade our nestboxes.

Queens over winter in an area and then seek out a protected location to build a paper nest and create a colony that will survive and multiply all summer. They often feed on caterpillars so in a way they also compete with the birds for food but there is normally a huge supply of caterpillars when the wasp colonies are building up in the heat of summer.

Last year I experimented with putting up wasp houses to see if I could draw the wasps away from my nestboxes and into their own habitat....Shawn (my son) and I put up about 100 various sized birdhouse gourds hanging them from tree limbs. I also experimented with various sized tin cans attached to fence posts, attached to the bottoms of large nestboxes, Some were mounted about 12 feet off the ground and some were only about 2 feet off the ground.

Did you know that just like bluebirds the closer to the ground you mount a wasp house and the closer to the trunk of a tree that you mount their house the more likely the wasp colony would be wiped out by climbing predators?

We have four main wasp species in this area and the most used "tin can" wasp house size was Campbell's soup cans. The most successful mounting location (least predation) for these cans was screwing the can to the lower

limbs of trees, far from the trunk, with the open end of the can facing down.

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The wasps preferred rusty cans to the ones with plastic or painted linings inside the cans. It would help to burn these cans first to remove the painted linings or Zinc that is used to protect the steel. With plastic linings the wasps would always attach the base of their nest to the head of the screw holding up the can.

The wasps favorite "nestbox" was the birdhouse gourds which were attached to lower tree limbs, barbed wire fences ETC. They preferred building in houses that were shaded. Several wasp nests were destroyed over summer due to squirrels or woodpeckers tearing up the gourds. They avoided locations out in the open IF they had a choice. It would probably help to leave the lid on and only open a hole in the bottom large enough to just admit the wasps. Spiders also found these gourds and tin cans to make good house locations. Two of the cans mounted to low hanging trees limbs, near a creek were filled with mud dauber nests.

Anyway, it will be interesting to see if I get an increase in occupancy in specific wasp houses and a decrease in bird houses this next year. I found chickadees, titmice and downy woodpeckers using the "wasp gourds" hanging from low tree limbs last week to roost in.

This next year I will use sections of timber bamboo and drill holes in the chambers for wasps, spiders and wood boring bumble bees to create a more natural looking insect habitat. KK

BLUEBIRD TIDBITS

(Test your Bluebirding Knowledge!)

Where should you not put the nest when cleaning out the nest box after the nestlings have fledged?

No where near the next box because it draws predators.

What would you wash the nest boxes with to clean them after each use?

A mild solution of Clorox and water.

Do baby bluebirds make chirping noises when getting ready to fledge?

Yes, sometimes for hours.

Do fledglings fly to the ground when leaving the box?

No, they fly directly to the trees, which could be as far as 100 ft.

If you grease a wooden pole and it soaks in, what is the solution?

Use duct tape and put the grease on top of it.

What does mama and papa bluebird do when babies are ready to fledge?

They call to the young and fly down and make circles around the nest box to coax them out.

Do fledglings all leave the nest at the same time?

No, they can be hours apart.

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What do bluebirds normally make their nests out of?

Grasses or pine needles

Do bluebirds finish their nest immediately when they start building?

Some will finish a nest in a matter of two days and some will wait as long as 3 weeks. In early spring, they tend to wait longer, perhaps because of weather conditions.

How can you tell when eggs have begun incubating?

By touching them lightly to see if they are warm.

Angel Of Mercy

by Paul Kilduff

Oregon Ridge Park, Cockeysville, Baltimore County, Maryland

Member Cornell University Bluebird List

Sunday, April 27, 2003

I coordinate the nestbox trail at Oregon Ridge Park. On this day, I was out at the park string-trimming under the nestboxes.

About an hour into my work, I came upon two tree swallows under a nestbox, one in the air and one on the ground. The one in the air seemed to be diving onto the one on the ground. I assumed it was two males fighting over territory, and figured I'd leave and come back when they were done.

Maybe two hours later, I came back, but now there was a tree swallow on the box, and the one on the ground was quite still. I knelt down and picked it up by the tail, and it felt stiff. Sure it was dead, I turned it over to see what had happened, and, looking at its eyes, I saw that the bird was alive, but barely. Looking carefully, I could see that its legs were tangled in thin black string - thread? It held a piece of grass in its talons. I tried to pull the grass away so I could get at the thread, but it wouldn't let go. Hmm - plenty of strength left. I finally pulled the grass out sideways.

I got out my little pen knife and began cutting the thread and removing it, but then I found a piece of thread that seemed to come right out of the bird's abdomen. I tugged a bit harder, but there was no give at all. The thread disappeared into the bird's chest, and gave no indication of coming loose. I realized that by cutting the thread I wasn't necessarily doing the right thing. I saw I was out of my depth.

My car was not far away and I knew I had a close-by rehabber's name and number in the car, and I had my cell phone with me. Grabbing the string trimmer in my free (right) hand, I went to the car, threw the trimmer in the back, and sat in the driver's seat. With one hand I found the book with the rehabber in it, and called the number. Please answer.

A recording! The recording said, "If this is a true wildlife emergency,
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you can page me on" Still holding the tree swallow in my left hand, I wrote down the number, called it, put in my number, and waited. Minutes later, my phone rang.

"This is Kathy Woods - you paged me?"

"Yes, this is Paul, from the Oregon Ridge bluebird trail. I have a tree swallow wrapped in some kind of line. It's near death."

"What kind of line?"

"I don't know, I think it's sewing thread."

"Where can I meet you?"

Angel of mercy! "Uh, you're in Jacksonville?"

"Yes."

We arranged a rendezvous and exchanged vehicle information

Okay! Let's go! Still with one hand, I steered the car out onto Shawan Road and headed east. Come on little guy (I thought of it as a male, but didn't know for sure). Just hang on. And I saw that he was hanging on. He had both talons wrapped around my closed little finger.

Finally, I got to the meeting place, the other side of the bridge on Paper Mill Road. There was space on the right to pull over. I pulled to the end of the space; maybe she can make a u-turn on the other side and pull in behind me.

Where is she? Come on little guy. Hold on. Praying. To whatever: please let her get here. Please let the bird hang on. He got still. His grip relaxed. Uh oh, I thought. Held him up, looked him in the eye - is it glazed, or closed? That little black eye looking back at me. Still alive.

Here's a red Honda, there's a wave, and hey! She made a U-ey on *this* side of the bridge, pulling up neatly behind me. I'm out of my car and she's out of hers. I hand her the bird and she says, "Can we get in your car?"

Oh. Okay. I thought she'd take it with her.

Kathy has two syringes, forceps, and little scissors. She's working with the forceps trying to untangle the thread. It's everywhere. So tangled. The black thread is hard to see against the bird's feathers.

She's showing me something: "How good is your vision, can you see this?" The thread is looped around the bird's neck. I got my nice big flashlight out and provided light as Kathy worked quickly to untangle the thread.

Eventually she pulled the cap off one of the syringes with her teeth.

I'm thinking, are you going to put it to sleep? As if in answer to my unspoken question, she says, "Just a little steroid, to help calm him down." She's calling it "him," too. Very gently, into the breast. And shortly, he does calm down. I take the syringe from her.

She keeps working.

I say, "If he lives through this, what a story he'll have to tell. Is it a 'he'
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do you think? I can never tell with tree swallows."

"Remind me to check later," Kathy says, but I didn't. I'm going to call it "he."

There just seems to be no end to the amount of thread wrapped around this guy's wings, legs, and head. Some of it is knotted. His legs are particularly involved, with lots of knots that have to be cut. "This leg may be damaged," she says.

Working. She blows the feathers away constantly so she can see what's beneath. Mr. tree swallow takes this in stride. How long since he's eaten? "I've got some mealworms with me," I say.

"I think I'll just give him some fluids."

Hmm. "By, uh..."

"Sub-cu."

Oh. Okay!

Now about six bikers on Harleys stop in the other lane, and then make u-turns and come up behind her car.

She doesn't take her eyes off the bird. "Cops?"

"No, bikers. I think they're just resting." Which it turned out they were.

Well, finally I watch as Kathy unwraps the last of the thread. Mr. tree swallow is still kind of subdued, and we are happy. Kathy mops her brow - she's really sweating. I don't know how long she worked - it seemed 20 minutes but maybe it was 15.

"How do you, uh, get compensated?"

"We don't charge for doing wildlife in this state, actually not in all of the States. You have a hobby that you love, right? Just a thank you is nice."

"Kathy, the bird and I both say thank you."

Then she took the other syringe, pulled off the cap with her teeth, and while I held the syringe, she spread his left leg and found a little patch under the leg. Licking her little finger, she wet the feathers to make a bare patch, and punctured the skin with the needle and squeezed in an amount of fluid. "With Dexamethasone, it's protocol to give this stuff afterward. Kind of like gatorade for animals." Then the right leg, then back again, till all the fluid was gone.

Then, she handed him back to me! Suddenly I'm all thumbs! Whoa! But soon I have him held firmly but gently in my left hand.

We got out of the car, shook hands. "This was great!" Shaking my head in amazement.

Kathy: "People ask me why I do this and I say: 'because I can!'"

"Well, I drove over here one-handed, I guess I can go back the same way!"

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"If he starts to get restless, hold him against your chest under your shirt, so it's dark."

"I'm so glad you were here," and I'm back in the car, pointed the wrong way. There's a spot for me to make a u-turn not far down the road, and I do.

Then back to the park. On the way, Mr. tree swallow does start to get a little restless, not much, but a little. I do hold him against my chest, under my shirt, and he's still the rest of the way.

We get back to the nestbox, and I was planning to put him in the box so he can rest till he's ready, but I think better of it and just decide to put him on the top of the box and watch to see what happens. But he won't let go of my finger. I try to dump him out of my hand but he won't let go. Okay, I'll just let you rest in my hand till you're ready. If you ever **will** be ready....

Knuckles down, I put my hand on top of the box, and he faces into the wind, eyes intent, but not moving.

This goes on for maybe three minutes. I hear some tree swallows at the next pair of boxes, and think maybe I should take the bird over there, but then the birds take off into the air and they're flying over us and he doesn't seem to notice. "Hey, do you hear that? Those're tree swallows! Come on!"

Maybe another two minutes went by and then, suddenly, as I looked away, he flew into the air, limping, heading into the wind, not making any headway, just staying even with me, flying into the wind. His flight seemed erratic, heading to the ground, then back up, then down again. Oh, god.

Then, like a rocket, he shot up to the top of a line of hardwoods, and flew into the trees so I lost sight of him for a moment. When he came back out, there was another bird with him!

Now, people who get paid to know such things say that a bird has no emotions because it has no hippocampus. I can't argue with that. So it could not have been joy that I saw in their flight, those two birds, speeding through the air together, swooping, diving, soaring. Couldn't have been! But it looked like joy from where I was standing!

And not having emotions, a bird can't feel gratitude. So, a few minutes later, as I stood, still leaning on the box, and two tree swallows made one quick circle around me, flying and chattering as only tree swallows can do, they couldn't have been saying, "Awesome job, thanks!" But I took it for a thank you anyway, and said, "You're welcome" as they dashed away.

And, like Tin Woodsman, I knew that I, at least, had a hippocampus because I could feel it breaking.

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The rest of the story:

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Since I'm talking to bluebirders here, I have to tell you the rest of the story, even though it makes a better story without its epilogue.

As I stood there, leaning on the box, my eyes lit on the piece of loosely-woven cloth that I had stapled to the box paired with the one I was leaning on. The cloth is very iridescent, and I thought it might do a better job of attracting blues than the satin-style cloth I'd used last year. Uh-oh. I looked carefully at the cloth and, yes, I think the black threads of the cloth are the same thread that Mr. or Ms. tree swallow was tangled in.

Wildlife Rehabilitators support their work by donations. No funding is provided by any government agency. For example, says Kathy, "if a frozen mouse is 40 cents, and a great horned owl eats 6 a day, and you have the owl for two months....that adds up. Then there are medicines, which we pay for ourselves, and supplies, syringes, fluids, tube feeding foods, etc." Donations in kind, such as sheets and towels, suet, bird seed, etc., or monetary donations, are accepted.

THANKS TO HELPING HANDS!

To [James Dean](#), Marion for cutting nestbox kits, supplying the hardware and helping to instruct participants in the January nestbox workshop.

To [Jimmy Orr](#), Oak Grove and [Clayton Cooper, Sr.](#), Delhi for helping instruct in the January nestbox workshop.

To [Cecil Tarver](#), Livingston for cutting nestbox kits and instructing our class for the spring nestbox workshop in Baton Rouge.

To [Bobbie Boykin](#), Prairieville and [Betty Lard](#), Hammond for volunteering to be in charge of refreshments for the Baton Rouge spring meeting.

To [Leo Terzia](#), Monroe for recruiting new members.

To [Chuck McCullen](#), Monroe, for contacting members that have not renewed.

To [Kenny Kleinpeter](#), Baton Rouge, for designing and hosting our new website that's coming soon!

FROM THE PERCH



Do you keep records of your bluebird and cavity nesting birds and have enough interest to report them so that everyone can see our results? If you are a member of NABS and have a trail of five or more nestboxes, please consider submitting your data to the Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. Since it has been updated, it takes very little time.

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I am disappointed that only six of our 152 members have responded to the LBBS year-end Nest Summary Report because these numbers do not reflect the true picture of what LABS bluebirders are doing.

With nesting season approaching, it's time to remind you that NABS recommends nestboxes be actively monitored at least once - or even twice - a week, and nestboxes should be cleaned after every nesting cycle. Some people have asked me if it is alright to open the nestbox and if opening the box would keep the parents from returning. I don't think a lot of bluebirders are quite convinced that monitoring does NOT keep the parents from returning to the nest. The tale that "if you touch the nestlings, they are abandoned" is a MYTH.

I encourage you to be better monitors by checking your nestboxes at least twice weekly and by keeping records. You will be surprised at how much fun the record keeping part of being a bluebirder is, and years later you will enjoy looking at your data from past seasons. I have kept records since day one when I had just one nestbox, and I enjoy going back and looking at them. I even have a journal that I started and reading it brings to mind vividly how things happened that year.

The highlight of the 2003 nesting season was in the last week of September, I could drive down Cooper Road and see Bluebirds for 3 miles all along on the power lines. My trail is on the upper end of the road. Six years ago, when I first started my trail, you could not see Bluebirds sitting all along on the power lines. I am the only one with a trail other than 3 nestboxes in my area, and I know that I am making a difference.

Hope to see you in April!!!

Evelyn

NABS 2004 CONVENTION - ITHACA, NY, JULY 7-11.

On that next special occasion, consider giving an LBBS membership to someone on that special day!!!!



Bluebirds along the bayous.....where we lend a helping hand!

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