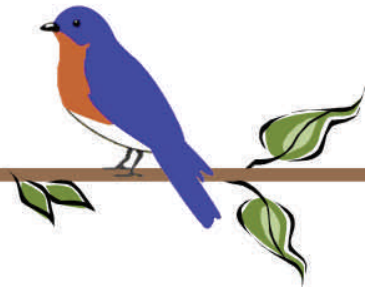


TEXAS Blues



The Newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society • Volume 7, Issue 3

6th Annual Symposium and Silent Auction
Registration form on website
Saturday, August 16, 2008
 Millennium Forest Dr. • The Woodlands, TX
 off The Woodlands High School off Research Forest

august		october	
sat	fri	sat	sun
16	3	4	5
Go to Bluebird symposium in The woodlands	Attend annual meeting in Mt. City	Staff booth at Expo in Austin	Staff booth at Expo in Austin

- Silent Auction Opens. Sign-in & Registration
- Optional tour of Garden and Pond
- Installation of nestbox
- LeAnn Sharp: Bluebird Basics
- Pauline Tom: Bluebird Basics
- Jennifer ...

YOU'RE INVITED!

Come to the TBS Annual Meeting & Dinner hosted by Ron and Pauline Tom! We'll have informal reports on the 2008 nesting season, a brief business meeting, an EXPO booth orientation, and a silent auction (by the way, if you have any items to donate for the auction, please let us know). Bring \$2.50 (donation towards TBS-provided chicken), one or two side dishes to share, and your own beverage.

When: Friday, 10/3/08, 6-8pm (appetizers at 5:30pm)

Where: 332 Live Oak Dr, Mountain City (just south of Austin)

RSVP: By Sunday, 9/28/08 (preferably earlier!), to (512) 268-5678 or tom5678@gmail.com

To do today...

- register for symposium
- call Pauline to RSVP for annual meeting
- email Ann Thames re: working at Expo

Booth Staffer

Booth staffer to talk about bluebirds and TBS with attendees at Texas Parks and Wildlife EXPO (choose shift length between 3-8 hours long, Oct 4 & 5, 2008). The EXPO is an annual outdoor extravaganza held at Texas Parks & Wildlife headquarters in southeast Austin. About 40,000 attend the event over the 2-day period.



semahta@yahoo.com

www.texasbluebirdsociety.org

Coordinator - People

2008 EXPO Accommodations

Texas Parks & Wildlife has arranged for special rates at the following hotels. Be sure to book by 9/12/08 under the group block "Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo." Come a day early for the TBS Annual Meeting in Mountain City!

Courtyard by Marriott Airport

7809 E. Ben White Blvd.

Austin, TX 78741

Phone: 512-386-7464

Rate: \$85

www.marriott.com/ausaa



Hampton Inn & Suites Austin Airport

7712 E. Riverside Drive

Austin, TX 78744

Phone: 512-389-1616

Rates: \$85

www.hampton-inn.com/hi/austin-airport



Hawthorn Suites LTD Austin Airport

7800 E. Riverside Drive

Austin, TX 78744

Phone: 512-247-6166

Rates: \$85

www.hawthorn.com



Hilton Austin Airport

9515 New Airport Drive

Austin, TX 78719

Phone: 512-385-6767

Rates: \$109

www.hilton.com



Holiday Inn Austin Town Lake

20 N. IH-35

Austin, TX 78701

Phone: 888-615-0509

Rates: \$139

www.holidayinn.com/austintownlake



La Quinta Inn & Suites Austin Airport

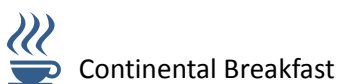
7625 E. Ben White Blvd.

Austin, TX 78741

Phone: 512-386-6800

Rates: \$85

www.laquinta.com



Albino Bluebirds!

On July 14th, TBS heard about an albino Eastern Bluebird female in Fruitdale accompanied by a full-colored male. For over a week, Leland & Nancy Carter spotted the pair investigating a nestbox in their yard.

Earlier in the season, Cliff Shackelford sent word of two albino Eastern Bluebird chicks in Lukfin at the home of John and Barbara Parker. The TPWD Commissioner and his wife love their nesting bluebirds every spring.

Top: Albino fledgling photo by Barbara Parker.

Bottom: Albino female photo by Leland Carter.



Book Review: Bringing Nature Home

By Kay Charter, Executive Director
Saving Birds Thru Habitat, Omena, MI 49674-02878

Two years ago, while attending an international wildlife conference, I struck up a conversation with the educational director of a state Audubon Society. In the course of the conversation I mentioned the fact that native plants host the insects that support our migratory birds. The young man, a biologist, challenged my statement.

“Do we know that’s true?” he asked.

He needs to pick up a copy of Dr. Douglas Tallamy’s wonderful new book, *Bringing Nature Home* (Timber Press, Inc., 2007, \$27.95), which recently appeared at bookstores across the country. In it, Tallamy, Professor and Chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, demonstrates the importance of native plants to healthy, viable terrestrial ecosystems. I learned about this book last fall, when I emailed Dr. Tallamy and requested permission to quote an article he had written about the relationship between native plants and the insects they host - and their impact on wildlife, particularly birds. He not only granted permission, he generously sent me a disk with the pre-pub galley of the book and I’ve been anxiously awaiting it since. It was well worth the wait.

The good professor says in his preface, “Occasionally we encounter a concept so obvious and intuitive that we have never thought to articulate it, so close to our noses that we could not see it, so entangled with our everyday experiences that we did not recognize it.” The concept is that because there is too little space left for the wildlife we care about and love to watch, we must make our yards friendlier to the birds, frogs, butterflies and other wild creatures with which we share this planet. With roughly forty million acres of land in American yards, his is a compelling argument. Tallamy appeals to the gardener in all of us to do just that. Although he says that *Bringing Nature Home* is not a “how-to” book, in a way, it is precisely that. While he does not attempt to instruct us on

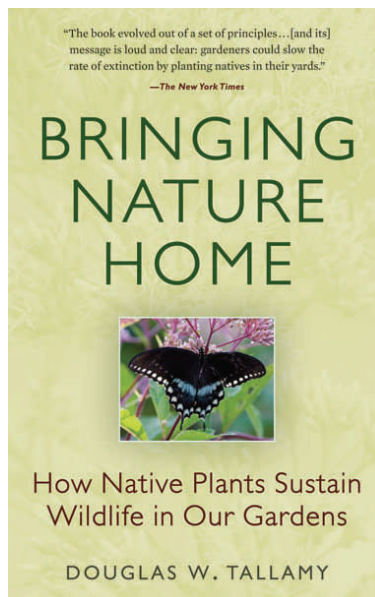
which plants to use, he takes us step by important step through the crucial reasoning around why we should - indeed, why we must - return as much of our personal property to native plants as possible. We must do that because native plants do (in spite of the above-mentioned biologist’s doubt) support the insects upon which those same birds, frogs, butterflies (and all the rest of us for that matter) depend.

Dr. Tallamy discovered that link when he and his wife purchased 10 acres in southeastern Pennsylvania. The land, previously farmed, was filled with alien plants such as autumn olive, multiflora rose, Bradford pears and others. The vegetation was so dense they had to cut trails through it in order to get inside of it. Then he took a walk along the trails to look for insects. He found virtually none except on the few natives struggling to survive under the stranglehold of invasives. It was a defining moment for him and he began to present programs to educate the general public about his discovery. The pamphlet he made up to hand out at those presentations eventually grew into the book.

Birders who still support the idea that autumn olive is good for birds—and there are a lot of them out there—will

gain insight from the following, “the foliage of autumn olive is inedible for almost all native insect herbivores. A field rich in goldenrod, Joe-Pye weed, boneset, milkweed, black-eyed Susan, and dozens of other productive perennials supplies copious amounts of insect biomass for birds to rear their young. After it has been invaded by autumn or Russian olive, that same field is virtually sterile.”

Filled with beautiful photographs of insects, plants, birds, and hard data presented in an easy to read style, *Bringing Nature Home* is a book every conservationist should read carefully. And every conservation educator must, as Tallamy himself has done, incorporate its message into his or her material and presentations.



From the Mailbag

We ran out of room to include these in our last issue, but we always love to hear from our members and see their photos! Please send your questions, comments, and photos to Pauline Tom (PTom5678@gmail.com).

Last summer I had my yard re-sodded. When the landscapers came in and dumped tons of dirt all over the yard, all of these little birds showed up on my window sills making quite a racket. They are a beautiful indigo color. I'm not from Texas and had never seen these birds before, but I believe they could be eastern blue birds. I'd like to attract them again by possibly putting out feeders, nestboxes, or baths. Any info you could provide would be much appreciated.

Thank you,
Jamie Murphy
January 22, 2008

What a gorgeous picture (*see below*)! These are beautiful Barn Swallows. They build their nests of mud, so the tons of dirt furnished just what they needed.

This publication gives plans for a Barn Swallow shelf: www.extension.umd.edu/publications/PDFs/FS798.pdf. Take care where you place such a shelf because the birds and the nestlings produce a lot of fecal matter and it drops to the ground or pavement below the nest. They often nest on front porches, and folks end up using an alternate door during the nesting.

As with all wildlife, furnish water. Barn Swallows will use it to make mud. Barn Swallows also eat flies and mosquitoes—quite a help in Texas!

If you have a somewhat open space with short grass, you might want to install a nestbox on a pole to help attract Eastern Bluebirds.



Barn swallows making themselves at home. Photo by Jamie Murphy.

The resource section of our website has several helpful files, particularly the nestbox manual “Homeowner’s Guide.”

You don’t say where you are in Texas. You might check our

website to see if you’re near one of the cities where we’ll have an event in the coming months. We offer a free nestbox with a \$15 membership at these events.

Yours,
Pauline

I am overjoyed that I have bluebirds in my backyard. I put up the birdhouse last fall in hopes they would come. I am in a new subdivision, so didn't expect them to make their home with me!!!

Jan Bills (Keller, TX)
February 4, 2008

Jan learned about TBS through our friends at the Wild Bird Center in Watauga.

She assists Barb Ohlman, TBS Ambassador in Keller, with monitoring nestboxes and stuffing new member packets.



Special Thanks to...

Janet & Donald Frick, Ed Melson, Joyce Valdez, and Ann Reed for their donations.

Ricky Walker for volunteering to sell TBS nestboxes, placing an ad for the nestboxes in her local newspaper, and donating to our Special Projects Fund.

Norm Shoemaker (coordinator), Barb Ohlman, Ron Tom and Pauline Tom for serving at the Blueberry Festival in Nacogdoches.

Schulz Printing for quality service and discount pricing on *Texas Blues*.

Sharon Kersten for volunteering to sell TBS nestboxes and checking out the “Start With Five” trail in Groesbeck City Park.

Jennifer Fleming for preparing 150 renewal letters.

Yoshi Beal for serving as production editor for *Texas Blues* and helping with many other graphics- and computer-related tasks.



T-Shirt Order Form

Show off your bluebird pride with Texas Bluebird Society apparel! To order a t-shirt, fill out the form below. To order other t-shirt colors, other types of shirts, or a shirt with an embroidered logo, visit <http://www.companycasuals.com/texasbluebird/>.

**Gildan® Ultra Cotton™
100% Cotton T-Shirt**

- 6.1-ounce, 100% cotton
- Seamless double-needle top-stitched collar
- Taped neck and shoulders
- Double-needle sleeve and bottom hem



Blue

Printed logo (embroidery available online!)

Choice of colors (more available online!)



Ash Pink Natural Sand Grey White



Color (circle)	Blue	Ash	Pink	Natural	Sand	Grey	White	To order more shirts in another color, fill out a second form
-----------------------	------	-----	------	---------	------	------	-------	---

Logo Style and Price (tax included)	Adult					Youth				Total Price	
	S	M	L	XL	2XL	XS	S	M	L		XL
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Across chest: \$13											
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S&H: 1–2 shirts, \$6. Add \$2 for each 1–2 shirts more (e.g., 5 shirts, \$10)									Total + S&H		

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More choices online at <http://www.companycasuals.com/texasbluebird/>

The Dangers of Supplemental Feeding

The following was posted by Pauline Tom on Bluebird-L, June 29, 2008.

Reading through the Bluebird-L digest from Saturday (with several posts about 4th nestings), Julie Zickefoose's presentation at NABS 2008 in Kearney came to mind. I emailed Julie for clarification, and she very graciously responded with detailed words of the ill-effects of excessive supplemental feeding (shared with her permission):

It was not only the female who got worn out; both male and female bluebirds failed to molt on time and were nearly naked by late August—tailless, with featherless heads and sparsely-feathered bodies. It was awful, but it woke me up to the reality that my feeding program had overtaxed them. I feel bad that I learned at their expense, but the suet dough experience this spring shows that I still hadn't learned my lesson.

...Four broods for a passerine that lays three to five eggs per clutch doesn't make biological sense. If the first clutch is five, the second clutch four, and subsequent clutches are three each, that means 15–18 eggs in a single season from a single female bluebird.

...Without supplementation, the bluebirds on my trail usually stop at two broods. Birds in my yard, which receive some supplementation over the winter and during cold rainy periods in the nesting season, often go for three. There is a contrast between the birds in my yard and the birds out on my trail, and I believe it's because I help the birds in my yard when it's rainy and cold, and because the yard is large, stays mown, and has a lot of things like mulberries and sumac.

What people who enthusiastically feed bluebirds may not understand is that neither suet dough nor mealworms are a balanced, or particularly good, food for them. Mealworms are low in phosphorus and high in fat and protein; and lard is solid fat and loaded with purines, which cause excessive production of uric acid. Rehabbers who raise baby birds and maintain adult birds, including me, avoid mealworms as a staple diet; crickets are much better.

I think that both mealworms and suet dough have their place in judicious cold weather feeding, but I remain skeptical of the ability of most bird-loving humans—

including myself—to limit their feeding to a level that's good for the birds. It feels good, so we do it, and many people do it to excess. If we could limit it to maybe five worms per bird once a day, or one small single handful of suet dough once a day, it probably wouldn't do any harm. But what I see more commonly is people who put out mealworms and suet dough several times a day, as I had been doing. I had thought that suet dough wouldn't cause the harm that mealworms did, but I found, with two birds in my yard developing severe gout, that I was wrong.

I will add that a month after withdrawing the suet dough, the gout has virtually disappeared in both individuals, and they are no longer favoring feet or legs.

I agree that mealworms and suet dough help us to develop a bond with birds, and that's a wonderful thing. I've written thousands of words on that very subject. But I have to make my point rather strongly in order to get the attention of people who might be inclined to pooh-poo it as alarmism. The best way to do that is to expose my own error, because then I can't be accused of having a hidden agenda. My only agenda is to make people aware that bluebirds can be harmed by excessive feeding of any artificial food, and I include mealworms under that umbrella.

As background, I've been feeding mealworms since 1985 and suet dough since 2002, and I've run a bluebird trail since 1982. That's 26 years of watching bluebirds closely, taking notes and sharing my observations with many thousands of people. I haven't come to these conclusions about artificial feeding lightly or easily. I have had to expose my own bad judgment and errors in order to share what I've learned.

—Julie Zickefoose



Feeding mealworms to bluebirds helps us develop a bond with them, but moderation is important. Photo by Patrick Jedamzik (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patjede/>).

Welcome New Members!

Gabriel Anderson
Edward S. Aycock
Nancy J. Batzloff
Jake & Kam Brewer
R.L. Broadwater
Andrea Brown
Romelle Cleveland
Darlene Cobb
Lloyd Cole
Nancy Davis
Bert Dieringer
Bobbie & Russell Doty
Richard Dove

Thomas Downing
Joan & Bob Francis
Susan Gallager
David Greenup
Debbie Highfill
Betty Hignite
Kris Hoepfner
James Johnston
Bob & Virginia Knibb
Michael Kunk
Vicki Lindsay
Paul Link
Sonja Logan

John F. Moss
Daniel Naone
Robert & Melinda Neblett
Jacque Nowels
Dawn Pace
Kristin Paradis
Charlene Payne
Stacia Pender
Peter & Carol Racheotes
Larry Rankin
Pierre & Sarah Roberts
Dr. Bob Rosebrock
Billy Russell

Elfriede Russell
Rebecca Schultz
Nina Seifert
Ed & Kay Sones
Joyce Starovie
Cynthia Taaffe
Josephine Taylor
David Wallace
Jimmie L. Watt
Lisa West
Julia Williamson

No Violation for Removing Cowbird Eggs from Nests

According to Linda McMurry, Program Specialist with Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD), “Brown-headed cowbirds (BHCB) are one of the exceptions to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and as such not protected under the Act. This means Texans are not in violation of the law when they remove the eggs of the BHCB from songbird nests.

“I would encourage bluebirders (and others!) to keep track of this sort of activity. If parasitism by the BHCB is frequent, then I would suggest that folks participate in the cowbird trapping program. Check the TPWD website (www.tpwd.state.tx.us) under Wildlife>Nuisance Wildlife for the cowbird pages. We have plenty of variety when it comes to trap plans! You’ll be amazed at all the other songbirds that you’ll suddenly be seeing!”



Brown-headed Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. Their eggs hatch faster and the nestlings grow larger and faster, often starving the other nestlings. Above: Photo by Bill Robinette from a 3rd nesting in Ennis. He & Lois contacted TBS about the odd egg. Below left: Brown-headed Cowbird nestling with dead Carolina Wren nestlings. Photo by Keith Kridler. Below right: Bewick's Wren nest in Mountain City. Photo by Pauline Tom.





Dear Texas Bluebird Society member:

As a friend of bluebirds and other cavity nesters, you understand the importance of monitoring nestboxes. Now you can help build a legacy of vital scientific data by submitting your observations to **NestWatch**—a new, free citizen science project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and funded by the National Science Foundation. Your valuable nest observations will be permanently stored as legacy data along with hundreds of thousands of other nesting records. When combined, these data will provide a wealth of information about breeding birds and the factors that influence their success across different landscapes.

NestWatch gathers information about not only cavity-nesters but all nesting birds. You're already familiar with the process: just visit nestboxes (and nests) during spring and summer to collect simple information about location, habitat, species, number of eggs, and number of young in the nest. The next step is to submit your observations online at www.nestwatch.org. The NestWatch database makes it easy for you to manage and organize your bird nesting records and to see your data alongside everyone else's!

With this centralized collection of information from across the continent, NestWatch will be able to track changes in reproductive timing and fledging success. Every observation is important in helping measure the impact of such things as climate change and habitat loss. Without you and other like-minded citizen scientists gathering this information, it would be impossible to track these large-scale processes.

For more information, including instructions and worksheets, visit www.nestwatch.org. Monitoring nestboxes and understanding the life cycle in the nest is a critical part of efforts to help conserve our precious birds. Support the spread of bluebirds across Texas by building a legacy... one nestbox at a time.

Sincerely, Tina Phillips
NestWatch Project Leader



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RETURN SERVICE
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