



## Eastern Bluebird Using Open Nest Cup? Very Rare!



Photo © Jason Estep

On May 24, 2017, Jason Estep noticed something unusual. A male Eastern Bluebird was inspecting an old robin's nest above a light fixture in an open-air facility in Franklin County, Ohio. He had seen a bluebird pair in the area on previous occasions, but did not think much of it until the male appeared to start working on this old robin's nest. Jason then monitored the nest for eight consecutive days and found, each time, a female bluebird sitting low in the nest. She appeared to be incubating!

For the next 23 days, Jason had to be away and could not monitor the nest (sometimes life gets in the way of data collection). Unfortunately, we will never know if the nest fledged or failed, or how many eggs were in it, but we do know that it was empty on the final nest check on July 11. At 25 feet high and under a roof overhang, the nest was challenging to monitor. Jason's notes indicate that the female would step away from the nest periodically and return to it throughout the day, ruling out the explanation that she was simply using it as an overnight roosting location. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that the pair "adopted" a nest full of blue eggs (the same color as their own eggs would be) after happening upon it within their territory. Although we have heard of birds incubating the eggs or feeding the young of other species, fostering is rare.



**Eastern Bluebird At Robin Nest**

A female Eastern Bluebird sits in an old nest of an American Robin.

Photo © Jason Estep

Might this have been caused by a coincidence of timing, similarity of egg color, and/or loss of their own nest?

### STRANGER THINGS

We think that Jason probably did see Eastern Bluebirds using a salvaged nest to try to raise their own young, and there are two main reasons. (1) It is the simplest explanation, and (2) Eastern Bluebirds have been documented to occasionally use cup nests. Captain S. G. Reid, writing in 1884 in *The Birds of Bermuda*, states

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about the Eastern Bluebird that "It occasionally drives the Red Bird (*Cardinalis virginianus*) from its nest, even after eggs have been laid, and uses it as a foundation for its own." Reid also noted finding nests "on the branches of trees" in Bermuda. Mr. A. Sprunt, Jr. (1946) records an instance of an Eastern Bluebird nest in South Carolina which was "saddled on the horizontal branch of an oak tree."

We asked Dr. Patricia Gowaty, a Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at UCLA who has studied bluebirds in the field for 30 years, how unusual this sighting is. According to Gowaty, the frequency of open-nesting in bluebirds is incredibly hard to know. "Almost nobody studies Eastern Bluebirds in natural nests. Focusing on nest boxes means there are a lot of variations in life history that we don't see." Gowaty explained that we tend to canonize what we expect from bluebirds by focusing so closely on nest box results. In the book *Longleaf, Far As The Eye Can See*, one can find a photo of an Eastern Bluebird nest situated within a vertical burn scar on a tree trunk, on the merest projection of bark. Gowaty points out that this type of nest may have been more common in the ancestral pine forests of the southeastern United States.

## DON'T BOX THEM IN

So was Jason's observation actually rare, or has our close study of nest boxes colored our perceptions of "normal" bluebird behavior? Jason told us that the small woodlot behind the facility was clear cut last summer. It's possible that the pair returned to their territory that otherwise had food and resources, but now lacks sufficient nesting cavities. Perhaps they exhibited the flexibility of their ancestors, before nest boxes were backyard staples.

At the time of writing, NestWatch holds 77,729 digital records of Eastern Bluebird nests. Of these, we could only find one that was similar to Jason's. Barbara Starr had Eastern Bluebirds nesting under the deck of her Victor, New York home in June of this year. Barbara reports that it was possible to peek between the floorboards to check the nest. Although the below-deck nest was successful, the bluebirds did not attempt a second nest in this spot (there are two nest boxes on the property, which are also used).

*This article is reprinted with permission from Cornell Labs NestWatch eNewsletter July 2017.*

*NestWatch is a citizen science program that tracks status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. Our observations make it possible for NestWatch to share this type of atypical findings with the birding world.*



### An Unusual Nest Site

Side view of nest repurposed by an Eastern Bluebird.

Photo © Jason Estep



### Below Deck

A pair of Eastern Bluebirds nested on deck supports in June 2017.

Photo © Barbara Starr



We only know about these unusual events because **YOU** report them.

### There Is Still Time!

Send your 2017 nesting season observations to [NestWatch.org](http://NestWatch.org)

## NestWatch Report: Bluebirds in Cypress Forest Park, Spring, TX

By Linda Peters

In 2015, as Garden Club president, I proposed that the Champion Forest Garden Club sponsor a Bluebird Trail in the Cypress Forest Park. As bluebirds love grassy spaces, it seemed like just the place to establish the nesting boxes. I prepared a report for the PUD board, got the okay, and we were in business.

Following our January 2015 meeting with the Bluebird expert, Linda Crum, who presented a program about these birds, walked to the park with us and helped us scout out four locations for the boxes. Linda helped us with correct spacing as well as selecting the sites for their afternoon shade, position to trees where the fledglings could fly on their first flight and nearness of water.



With a great group of volunteers, we went to Wild Birds, Unlimited and purchased four boxes, stands, predator baffles and hardware. We all went to the park and installed our first boxes at the sites selected.

I downloaded a Geo-Mapping app and got the longitude and latitudes of the locations. I then went to the NestWatch.org website and registered them. Then we began to check them a couple of times a week.

We were elated when we saw the first nest being made. We had the first nest and eggs in March of 2016. During that season, we had two nests and 8 birds fledged. We felt that it was quite a great season.



We learned a lot that first year. Eggs are laid one per day until the female is done laying. Then the mother sits on the eggs until they hatch. The amount of time from the eggs hatching and the birds leaving the nest was a mere 3 weeks! Most importantly, when the babies are newly hatched, they will open their mouths when we check the nests until their eyes are open. Afterwards, they will lie quietly when the nest is checked. This does NOT mean they are dead!! You can see from this photo just what I mean.

This year, we added 2 more boxes on the other side of the park. Our first nest began in February and we had 6 fledglings from that nest. In all, this year, we had 6 nesting attempts, 36 eggs, 34 young and 32 fledged birds!

If you are walking in the Park, be sure to look for bluebirds, they are out there singing and adding to the beauty of the park.





### **Patricia Adair Gowaty (Ph.D.)**

#### **“An Informal Remembrance of Forty Years of Bluebird Passions”**

Patty Gowaty is a field ecologist and evolutionary biologist, who has studied wild-living eastern bluebirds for 30 years, and captive fruit flies for 15 years. Her questions are mostly about individual variation in behavior and the correlated variables of individual lifespan and reproductive success. She titled her scientific autobiography “Watcher”, which is her main “method”. She was a Distinguished Research Professor at University of Georgia, before becoming a Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at UCLA. The National Science Foundation funded her research continuously from 1982 through 2016. Grants from

the National Institutes of Health also supported her bluebird research. She is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a Fellow of the International Ornithological Congress and a Fellow of the Animal Behavior Society. What she wants to do most now is to find an undisturbed longleaf forest in which to watch bluebirds using natural cavities.

A 1999 Lamar Dodd Award recipient, and 2003 Distinguished Research Professor recipient, Dr. Gowaty is a Fellow, former President and Quest Award recipient of the Animal Behavior Society, and a Fellow and past Vice President of the American Ornithologists’ Union. She holds a life-time appointment on the International Ornithological Committee, the governing body of the International Ornithological Congress.



### **Caren Cooper (Ph.D.)**

#### **“Citizen Science and How It Can Help Bluebirds”**

Associate Professor in Forestry and Environmental Resources at North Carolina State University in the Chancellor’s Faculty Excellence Program in Leadership in Public Science, jointly appointed as Assistant Head of the Biodiversity Research Lab at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

She teaches and mentors undergraduate and graduate students in becoming public scientists, that is, familiar with citizen science, public science communication, and open science practices.

Cooper’s research focuses on bird behavior and reproduction, residential stewardship and conservation, and community pollution bio-monitoring and mapping. She has two current citizen science projects. *Sparrow Swap* has dual goals of helping volunteer nest monitors minimize damage by house sparrows while also exploring the potential of house sparrow eggs as a tool for the biomonitoring of

contaminants. *Sound Around Town*, in partnership with the National Parks Service and Colorado State University, investigates ecology and human well-being associated with soundscapes in residential and urban areas. Cooper also carries out scholarly studies of citizen science, recreationists, and the dynamics of coupled human-natural systems.

For 14 years (2001-2015), Cooper helped design citizen science projects at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology including My Yard Counts, YardMap, NestWatch, Celebrate Urban Birds, and the House Sparrow Project. Cooper has over 50 publications, including research papers that relied on data from NestWatch, Project FeederWatch, Christmas Bird Count, Breeding Bird Survey, and My Yard Counts. Cooper also collaborates with social scientists to study birdwatchers and citizen scientists to understand land stewardship and conservation behaviors, as well as the societal implications of participatory research. Visit [www.carencooper.com](http://www.carencooper.com) to learn more about Caren’s research and Citizen Scientist activities.



## Jeff and Mary O. Parker

### “Backyard Photography”

Jeff & Mary O. Parker are a dynamic husband-wife team who enjoy sharing their passion for the natural world with the naturally curious. They regularly give photography workshops at their central-Texas nature preserve, Red Belly Ranch.

Jeff is equal parts nature photographer, adventurer, and conservationist. His images have appeared in many publications including *Audubon* and *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine*. You'll also spot his images in the books *Images for Conservation (Pro-Tour Series): Borderlands of Laredo* and *Wildlife in Focus*. Jeff's work has garnered him numerous awards, including prizes in the 2010 Images for Conservation 2010 Pro-Tour.

Mary O. is an award-winning writer whose work includes books and magazine articles. In 2015, she received the 2015 Gabriele Rico Award in Creative Nonfiction, and, in December 2016 she was short-listed for the

Barry Lopez Prize in Creative Nonfiction. Through her Red Belly Writing School, Mary O. gives creativity and writing workshops.

Together, the Parkers created *Explore Texas: A Nature Travel Guide (Texas A&M University Press; June 2016)*. The book, which features Mary O.'s writing and Jeff's photography, received a 2016 “Excellence in Craft” award from the Texas Outdoor Writers' Association. *Publishers Weekly* included it on its list of the best travel books of 2016.

The Parkers are proud members of the Texas Bluebird Society.

## 2018 Bluebird Symposium

✓Presentations ✓Displays ✓Advice  
(with Silent Auction FUNdraiser)

**Saturday, February 24, 2018**

Brazos County Expo Center, 5827 Leonard Rd, Bryan, TX 77807

**9:00 AM–3:00 PM**

**Doors open at 8:30 for Registration and Silent Auction**

**On-line registration: [RSVPbook.com/2018event](http://RSVPbook.com/2018event)**

### Featured Speakers (live/remote)

Dr. Patricia Gowaty, world's foremost bluebird researcher

Dr. Caren Cooper, Citizen Science & Sparrow Control  
Alternative

Jeff and Mary O. Parker, Backyard Photography  
Other Topics: Bluebird Basics, NestWatch, House Sparrow  
Control, etc.

### Friday Evening Social, Dinner, and Raptor Presentation (Silent Auction FUNdraiser open)

Brazos County Expo Center, Bryan. Deadline: Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>

6:00 Social Hour with frozen margaritas, *NO BYOB (state law)*.

6:30 Dinner \$18.00 Followed by Last Chance Forever: The Bird of Prey Conservancy—*live raptor demonstration*

**Lodging: The Stella Hotel, 4100 Lake Atlas Drive, Bryan, TX 77807** \$108.00 + tax through Feb 2nd.

Sleeping Room Reservation Method: (979) 773-1001, Give code TBSK0218

Register online through The Stella website using this same code.

### Registration Costs and Deadlines

Extra Early Bird Advance Registration: \$25.00. Box Lunch and 20 Door prize tickets.

Deadline: **December 24th**

Early Bird Advance Registration: \$25.00. Box Lunch and 10 Door prize tickets.

Deadline: **January 24th**

Standard Advance Registration: \$25.00. Box Lunch and 5 Door prize tickets.

Deadline: **February 10th**

At-the-door Registration: \$15.00. No meal and no door prize tickets.

### Send Donated Silent Auction Items To:

Beverly Davis (281) 660-0521

2411 Stableridge Drive

Conroe, TX 77384

[auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org)



# I'm A Nest Watcher!



"I just closed out my NestWatch season (I think). This year one ambitious pair of Bluebird adults produced 3 separate nests and successfully raised 5 fledglings each time. Heroic! Fifteen new voices. I hope that next year we can attract more than one nesting pair." Karla Trefny, Bandera.

"I have 12 boxes on our property that I report to Nestwatch. I use the data and spreadsheets provided by Nestwatch at the end of the year to help in writing my annual Wildlife Management Plan for my agricultural exemption on our property taxes. It is wonderful how this information summarizes the yearly activity of my bird boxes.

I also have a Bluebird Trail at Krause Elementary, the school I retired from 2 years ago.

While I taught there, I worked with the 3rd grade GT teachers and let the GT students help with the monitoring and reporting to Nestwatch, as a special project for the gifted and talented students. I still monitor and report these 6 boxes." Royceanna Kendall, Brenham.



Photo by Donna Honkomp

Donna Honkomp and Beth Almaraz monitor 30 bluebird boxes on the US Army Corps of Engineers property, Lake Benbrook. "Even with the heat in August, we continue looking after a few hatchlings. Such a wonderful opportunity and so much fun."

"I am 92 years old confined to a wheelchair and unable to stand more than a minute or two. I monitored my boxes through my caregivers who followed my instructions on when and how to check my boxes. At the present none of my boxes are occupied. All the birds that nested this year were Bluebirds and were protected by spookers after the first egg until the birds fledged. I recommend nest watching to those who are handicapped especially because it is a very rewarding hobby and requires so little physical attention." Jim Gazzaway, Fairfield.

## BECAUSE YOU NESTWATCH!

**First two EABL eggs laid in Texas on January 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Last EABL fledged in Texas on August 29<sup>th</sup>**

ProjectWide Data Downloads are available by Species /State through <http://nestwatch.org>

**(As of Sept.) Texas reported the largest # of 2017 EABL nesting attempts - 898!**

## Election And Annual Survey Time!

**Jane Jenkins** (Conroe) is nominated to serve an initial two year term.

Lonnie Castleman and Kay Dansby will serve the 2nd year of their initial 2-year term in 2018.

All other board members have agreed to serve another year.



- Watch email for link to ballot and annual survey on or about November 1st.
- There is no "competition." Each nominee on the ballot, if elected, will serve.
- We email a ballot to each address in our records. Simply click on the link provided to access the ballot.
- If you want to provide/change (or confirm we have your correct address), provide your email address to [records@txblues.org](mailto:records@txblues.org) on or before October 20th.
- If you do not receive your election email by November 4th, please notify [tbs@txblues.org](mailto:tbs@txblues.org)
- If you do not have email, mail your ballot choice (Yes or No) to: TBS, PO Box 40868 Austin, TX 78704.
- The ballot allows for write-in candidates. Secure his/her permission before submitting name,

## Board of Directors

### Pauline Tom

President  
Executive Committee  
EventPlans Team  
(Mountain City)

### Lonnie Castleman

Vice-President  
Executive Committee  
EventPlans Team  
Nestbox Const. Coord.  
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### Linda Crum

Interim Treasurer  
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### Kay Dansby

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## Advisory Board

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### Contact Us:

tbs@txblues.org,  
PO Box 40868  
Austin, TX 78704  
512-268-5678 (Pauline Tom)

### Moved?

Send email/address changes  
to records@txblues.org

## Volunteers Are Appreciated!

Loretta Baily  
Debbie Bradshaw  
Lonnie Castleman  
Linda Crum  
Kay Dansby  
Beverly Davis  
Alicia Harry  
Benni Konvicka  
Aliyah Rucker  
Pauline Tom  
Ron Tom  
Vanessa Voisinet



Will need your help for the 2018 Kickoff event!

Volunteers Are Always Needed! Call 512-268-5678

## Thanks For Your Financial \$upport!

John Barrow	Dennie George	Ray Noblit
Stan Blackwell	Andrew Fletching	Denise Oates
Clyde Camp	Dawn Hanson	Saundra Ogle
CEMEX Balcones	Janice Hill	Sarah Pratt
Catherine Cemet	Jerry Krampota	Patricia Rees
Brant D. & Arnette	Ernest Kroll	Linda Sucher
Candace Faber	John Lammers	Steve Sucher
Andrew Fletching	Verna Lammers	
Fox Island Alpacas	Albert Mitzell	

## Welcome New Members! *\*New members who give us permission to print their names*

- Lydia Abuisi
  - Janet Krolczyk CEMEX Balcones
  - Adam Slusser CEMEX Balcones
  - Debra Ewing
  - Luci Gladden
  - Jeffrey Glatly
  - Donna Honkomp
  - Amber Hutchins
  - Zoe Killian
  - Constance Kivell
  - Jim Kotchavar
  - Edie LeBourgeois
  - Virginia Livingston
  - Lynn McMain
  - Debbie McMullen
  - Karen Morris
  - Shirley Pradt
  - Ralph & Carol Roeder
  - Joseph Schumacher
  - Ray & Grace Solis
  - Gretchen Vogel
  - Erik Wolf
  - Gary Woods
- MAK, Dallardsville •R&SB, Marlin •BS, Austin •BN, Georgetown •PF, Conroe  
•SJ, Baytown

## Lifetime Members Joining by September 2017

**Kathy Bernobich**

**Al Imrek**

**Doyal Nelms**

**Annette T. Palva**

**Jean Marie Wesson**

**Thanks for your support!**



**2018 Bluebird Symposium**  
 ✓ Presentations ✓ Displays ✓ Advice  
 (with Silent Auction Fundraiser)  
 2018event.tbbiaves.org



**Saturday, February 24, 2018**

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**9:00 AM-3:00 PM**

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**Featured Speakers (live/remote)**

- Dr. Patricia Gowaty, Remembrance of 40 Years of Bluebird Passions
- Dr. Carin Cooper, Citizen Science and How it Helps Bluebirds
- Jeff and Mary O. Parker, Backyard Photography

**Other Topics:** Bluebird Basics, NestWatch, House Sparrow Control, etc.

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- Early Bird Advance Registration: \$35.00. Box lunch and 10 Door prize tickets. Deadline: January 24th
- Standard Advance Registration: \$75.00. Box Lunch and 5 Door prize tickets. Deadline: February 10th

At the-door Registration: \$15.00. No meal and no door prize tickets.

**Friday Evening Social, Dinner, and Raptor Presentation (Silent Auction Fundraiser open)**

- Brazos County Expo Center, Bryan, Texas. Deadline: Feb. 10th
- 6:00-8:00: Hour with frozen margaritas, MO BIRD (more later).
- 6:30- Dinner \$18.00. Followed by Last Chance Forever: The Bird of Prey Conservancy—let register \$18.00. Tax through Feb 2nd

**Lodging: The Stella Hotel, 4100 Lake Atlas Drive, Bryan, TX 77807 \$108.00 + tax through Feb 2nd**

Sleeping Room Reservation Method: (979) 773-1001. Give code TBSX0718

Register online through The Stella website using this same code.

**FREE Nestbox to members who pledge to "NestWatch" at least two nestboxes**

(submit observations to Cornell Lab of Ornithology through [www.NestWatch.org](http://www.NestWatch.org))

**Send Donated Silent Auction Items to:**

Beverly Davis (281) 665-0523  
 2413 Stableridge Dr  
 Comroe, TX 77384  
[auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:auction@texasbluebirdsociety.org)

Donations for notification of donations received after Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> must be processed monthly, one by one, and will miss the program publication deadline.

TBS is registered by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible on federal tax returns.

**For More Information Contact:**

[events@tbbiaves.org](mailto:events@tbbiaves.org)  
 (512) 268-5678 or (936) 439-7114

Support provided by the Bryan, TX chapter



photo by David Cooper

**ADVANCE Snail Mail Registration (includes Box Lunch)**  
 On-line registration available at [RSVPbook.com/2018event](http://RSVPbook.com/2018event)  
 Registrant #1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Registrant #2 (same street address)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

# Registrants (Please circle)	Description	Cost
1	2 Member	\$25.00
1	2 Non-Member	\$25.00
1	2 Friday Dinner	\$38.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Check # _____		Total Due: _____

**New \$15 Membership at this event includes FREE nestbox!**

Do you plan to join at the meeting?  Y  N

(This is not a firm commitment by membership. Please do not send membership dues now.)

To register more attendees, please include an additional sheet with your mailing.

**For Planning Purposes Only**

1. TBS Members and New Members: TBS will give you a FREE nestbox at this event if you pledge to "NestWatch" at least 2 nestboxes (submit observations to Cornell Lab of Ornithology through [www.nestbox.org](http://www.nestbox.org)).

Do you plan to participate?  Yes  No  N/A

2. \$15 Nestboxes available for purchase (based upon availability). How many do you plan to purchase? \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Registration Form with Payment made payable to "Texas Bluebird Society" to: TBS Event Registration

P.O. Box 132101  
 Spring, TX 77393

- EXTRA EARLY BIRD Registration—Deadline December 24, 2017
- EARLY BIRD Registration—Deadline January 24, 2018
- STANDARD Registration—Deadline February 10, 2018
- AT-THE-DOOR Registration available (no lunch or door prize chance)







### Ideas for my bluebird friends!

Check out **PURCHASE** tabs at [txblues.org](http://txblues.org)

Gifts for your bluebird friends

Hats!

Use on a nestbox, in your backyard or in a park

Perfect gift for everyone, "Texas" style nestbox

Variety of items with our logo

Handy?

Build a HeatShield, a nestbox, or a baffle from our plans

Donate to TBS

Don't forget...

Sparrow Spookers  
Kingston Baffles  
Van Ert Traps

**Federal law protects all native nesting birds!**

- Do not disturb birds or collect nests/eggs.
- Monitor and report activity to NestWatch.

The Texas Bluebird Society newsletter, *TX Blues*, is published four times a year. March ■ May ■ July ■ October

Debbie Bradshaw Park, Editor

Send stories/photos to [editor@txblues.org](mailto:editor@txblues.org)

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**Registrant #1**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Registrant #2 (same street address)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name for Name Tag \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

# Registrants (Please circle)	Description	Cost	
1	2	Member	\$25.00
1	2	New Member	\$25.00
1	2	Friday Dinner	\$18.00

Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Total Due: \_\_\_\_\_

(This is not a firm commitment for membership. Please do not send membership dues now.)

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 P.O. Box 132101  
 Spring, TX 77393

In areas in which bluebirds overwinter ... nestboxes placed out in October, when the size of the local population is at its peak (due to influx of migrant bluebirds), attract new bluebirds into a potential nesting area. (BNA)

Mail registration form with payment to  
 TBS Event Registration  
 P.O. Box 132101 Spring, TX 77393