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Federal law protects all native nesting birds!

★ Do not disturb birds or collect nests/eggs.

★ Monitor and report activity to NestWatch.

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Send stories/photos to
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Message From New TBS President Lonnie Castleman

Greetings to all bluebird enthusiasts from your newly elected President. No, not the one at the Whitehouse, but the one from East Texas who has a little less hair on top! Join me as we begin the 20th year of Texas Bluebird Society's existence. After experiencing the frustration and hardships of the past year, we all look forward to a much more productive and pleasant 2021!

Speaking of 2021, I want to personally thank our new officers and expanded Board of Directors for stepping up to the plate. TBS is all volunteer based and the VOLUNTEERS are the lifeblood of the organization. There are dozens of tasks that need to be completed each month to keep us moving forward, and we are constantly soliciting help in taking care of all kinds of chores. We all share a common passion for the beautiful and inspirational bluebird and that is what keeps us going. I will be he drawing heavily upon the new Board for assistance in many areas to accomplish our goals this year. A good example is Carrie Brown, who has agreed to take the task(s) of Fundraising Projects made necessary by the Covid restrictions shutting down our festivals, presentations, and other events. Another is Stephen Watkins, who

has agreed to take on repairs to the "X-boxes" (damaged nestboxes) for the North Texas region and returning them to inventory.

"Twenty years ago, Immediate Past President, Pauline Tom saw the need to start an organization that would furnish information specific to the Eastern Bluebird population of Texas. A small group of bluebird lovers came alongside to make Texas Bluebird Society a reality. Pauline's tireless dedication and devotion to the growth and nourishment of TBS can never be sufficiently recognized! God bless and keep her in what she calls "retirement!"

Spring has always been looked upon as the season of hope, excitement and new beginnings. The arrival of the bluebird has long been among the first signs of transition from winter to spring. Being well into your first nesting cycle by the time you read this, I hope you have already begun to receive the joy brought by our wonderful bluebirds!



We do it for the birds!

Mountain Bluebirds Banded At Lake Lewisville

report and photos provided by Vin Merrill

Mountain Bluebirds (MOBL) have been reported further east than their normal winter range in Texas. Vin was at Lewisville Lake (Denton County, near Lewisville) where he observed bander, Ivy Doah, banding a Mountain Bluebird.



Mountain Bluebird, out of its normal winter range, is banded at Lake Lewisville.

The project was originally arranged to band sparrows at Barn Owl Ridge. How fortunate Ivy was able to capture and band a MOBL. Vin shared the photos he was given by another friendly photographer.



Specific measurements and vitals are gathered during the banding process.



Ivy Doah begins banding.

Since early December, eBird reports MOBLs in east Texas at John Paul Landing in Cypress (Central Texas area), McLennan and even in Calcasieu near Lake Charles in Louisiana. Many western birds have wandered farther east this winter. The extensive wildfires last summer have resulted in the critical loss of habitat for both the birds and their food sources.

Thanks to all who report to eBird! Providing critical research data, and, it allows us the opportunity to find the birds!



Banded and ready to go.

They're Here, They're There, They're Everywhere!

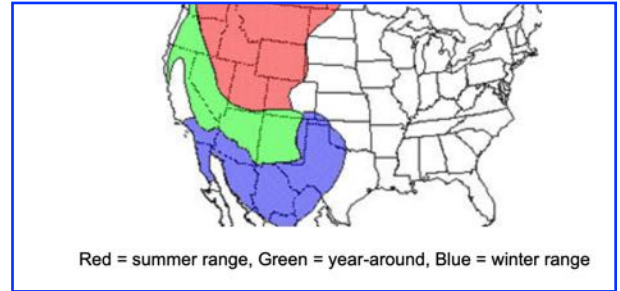
Mountain Bluebirds Seen Across Texas



Photographer Derrick L. Mims was birding in Bexar County when he spotted this group of Mountain Bluebirds near Boerne. Derrick reported 20 Mountain Bluebirds to eBird on December 20th. Visit [eBird](#) to view where other sightings are occurring around Texas.



Just north of Austin (Williamson County) there has been a persistent flock of Mountain Bluebirds hanging out for a couple of weeks in a rural area. They've also been seen on Hamilton Pool Road near Reimer's Ranch Park. Mountain Bluebirds generally don't come this far east for winter. I'm not sure what's brought them here, but I know why some have been staying. Food. Specifically, berries. They are very fond of Flameleaf Sumac berries. The berries offer nutrition long after the leaves have fallen. Photo by Katherine Benbow Daniels on 12/5/2020.



As the TPWD range map above indicates, Mountain Bluebirds (MOBL) are winter residents in western Texas. The recent Central Texas Christmas Bird Count reported an unusual increase in the number of MOBLs. eBird reports MOBL activity across Texas and into western Louisiana.



A female Mountain Bluebird was spotted in December in Falcon State Park, located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. A male Mountain Bluebird (below) was seen in January. Photos by Peggy Rudman.



Rusty Blackhaw

by Linda Crum,
Master Gardener/Master Naturalist

Rusty blackhaw viburnum is a viburnum that is native to eastern and central United States. The name comes from the reddish-brown hairs that grow on the underside of the leaves. A deciduous perennial that grows into a small tree about 15-20 feet, giving warm colors of red, lavender, pink and orange in the fall. A number of references say that it blooms in April; however, that can vary depending on where it is growing. The one in my garden blooms in late February/early March. It is being covered with snow as I write this article so it may not bloom at all this year. The blooms are clusters of white flowers up to 4 inches wide.

Its native habitat is open woodlands with well-draining sandy, loam or clay soil. It appreciates part-shade and survives with little water. Rusty blackhaw is very useful to wildlife. Bees, butterflies and other insect pollinators enjoy the nectar. Birds devour the dark blue-black fruit, called drupes. Rusty blackhaw viburnum is moderately deer-resistant. Keep in mind that deer will eat anything if hungry.

Propagation is by seeds or by semi-hardwood cuttings taken in fall. Rooting of cuttings is very slow. Seed germination requires a period of stratification. There are no serious problems with insect or disease.



What Is That White Stuff?



*(1/14/21) "Wanted to share shots of my blues in the snow we had today! In Joshua, Texas!"
Photo by Meg Bacanskas.*



"I have never seen a bluebird eat peanut butter!" Photo by Jennifer Fleming in her backyard in Orange on 2/15/2021.



It is cold out here! Glad the feeders are kept full. 2/15/21. Photo by Jennifer Fleming in Orange.

Granite Lake Bluebird Trail Is Ready

report and photos provided by Mary Blevins



Mary Blevins installs protective heatshields

I had my first bluebird sighting at my new tiny homesite in Kingsland and I was mesmerized with its color. Immediately I was hooked on watching their journey and hopeful for sighting more.

After doing some research, I found the Texas Bluebird Society and the Nestbox Program.

With my property owner's permission and participation, we established the Granite Lake Bluebird Trail, consisting of 4 nestboxes among the natural habitat around this 4-acre lake. We got our boxes too late for the Spring 2020 season, but all our boxes are up and ready for the 2021 nesting season.

Property owners Mike Leamon and Lisa Morgan participated with me in the installation of these nestboxes around the lake. We have established a data information link with Nest Watch so that everyone can view our progress.



Lisa Morgan adds predator baffle to nestbox.

Our bluebird habitat continues to evolve as we add attracting plants and sustainable food sources. We have an abundance of wildflowers and other wildlife located at Granite Lake and Mike and Lisa are passionate about keeping this wild habitat alive.

Kingsland is located in the heart of the Highland Lakes Area of the Texas Hill Country.

We encourage anyone to stop by and stretch your legs with a walk around Granite Lake to view our nesting boxes. We are a village of Tiny homes

located on an 11-acre destination vacation property. If you want to stay longer than just a day trip, Mike offers rentals to friends and family so that you can experience Tiny Home living, bluebird watching, and other wildlife sightings.

Mention the Texas Bluebird Society for a Grand Tour of the Trail. We welcome experienced bluebird watchers to visit our community and provide any knowledge to help us ensure the success of our bluebird habitat.

Just Google 3100 Ranch Road 2545 Kingsland.

See y'all soon!



Mike Leamon helps Mary install nestboxes.

Jeanne Henderson, was our 1st visitor along the trail, keeping her eyes open for any new sightings.



I Can See You!

Live-streaming From Inside The Nestbox

by Larry Melamed

I recently became one of the many people streaming from inside bird nestboxes. Being an



internet and technology nut, I decided I wanted to put cameras in my bluebird nestboxes and stream them live on the internet.

My nestboxes

contain a camera powered by a battery and solar panel, and are set up behind my house. I have a router in “repeater” mode on my back porch so I have more range than trying to use the router inside my house. I can get a decent enough signal up to about 600 feet from my outside router.

This article will cover some things I’ve learned about batteries and solar panels, as well as mounting the camera, so that you can view what’s going on inside your nestboxes. Streaming over the internet to the world gets much more complicated and could be the topic of a future article.

ITEM LIST

- Wyze Cam v2 (<https://amzn.to/2MFmUId>)
- Wyze cam V2 Wall Mount Bracket (<https://amzn.to/3thkvuO>)
- Short USB Type C Cable (<https://amzn.to/2NX4v13>)
- Voltaic Systems V75 Always On External Battery Pack with Dual USB Ports - 19,200mAh (<https://amzn.to/36wR8v1>)
- WISSBLUE Solar Panel Charger 21W/60W, Dual USB 4.2A Fast Solar Charger (<https://amzn.to/36A7y5H>)
- Asus RT-AC66U in repeater Mode (any router will do)
- Optional

Cameras

I found people using many cameras to stream live video from inside nestboxes, but I found most of them to be inferior to the Wyze and Blink cameras. I chose the Wyze Cam v2 for 2 reasons: The Wyze camera runs about \$25, the Blink \$90, and the Wyze Cam can use the Real Time Streaming Protocol (RTSP) required for encoders that can stream over the internet. If you’re only interested in watching your video from your phone or computer then you won’t need to worry about updating the camera’s firmware, and you can use either the Blink or Wyze camera. I have found the Blink camera to have a slightly better picture.

BATTERIES AND SOLAR PANELS

I spent a lot of time testing various battery banks and solar panels. The only batteries I found that are “always on” whether in charging mode (day time) or discharging mode (night time) are made by Voltaic Systems. The others tend to drop power when switching between daylight and darkness, and I would have to go out to unplug and re-plug the cable so the camera powers up again. I chose Voltaic Systems’ V75 for its capacity of 19,200mAh / 71 watt hours. Fully charged, it can run the camera for about three days without additional charging to get through rainy days. I also have my cameras set to power on only during daylight to reserve power overnight. I tested a few solar panels and decided on the WISSBLUE Solar Panel Charger 21W/60W, Dual USB 4.2A Fast Solar Charger since it can keep the battery close to fully charged with a full day of sunlight. As with anything solar, direct sunlight is required. If there are too many consecutive days of rain without much sun the battery will eventually run down, in

which case I bring mine inside and recharge them through an outlet in the wall.

NESTBOXES

I use the Texas Bluebird Society nestboxes. I had to raise the roof in order to install the camera in such a way that it does not block the entrance hole. I recently received a modified version of the nestbox with a higher roof for future deployments. It will be interesting to see how well the color video works without an opening at the top letting light in.

All of the Wyze and Blink cameras have a night vision mode which works with little or no light, but only records in black & white.

SETTING UP

The first step is to power up and configure the camera per the manufacturer's instructions included with the camera. This includes giving the camera a name and connecting it to your wifi.

The next step is mounting the camera in the box using a Wyze Cam V2 Wall Mount Bracket. It has to be high enough so as not to block the opening for the bluebirds. I removed the roof to access the back wall of the box. The bracket is then screwed into the back of the nestbox. I used 3/8-inch diameter PVC pipe cut into one-inch pieces to raise the roof. I then cut a one-inch strip of thin wood to put on the side of the nestbox that faces north during the winter. You can see part of the camera in the right photo due to the raised roof. I also used heat shields since our summers are so hot.



The third step is to mount a board on which to attach the solar panel on top and the battery underneath. I picked up the board for \$7 and a

plastic case for the battery for \$5 at Hobby Lobby. I used two "L" brackets from Lowe's that I bent so the panel would be at an angle toward the sun. I used the short USB type C cable to connect the solar panel to the C connector (middle input on the top of the battery) and used



the USB cable that comes with the camera to connect the battery to the camera inside.

THE END RESULT



All four sides, nestboxes face northeast, away from prevailing winds. You can monitor the video using the phone app for either the Wyze or Blink camera.



Follow my live streams <http://birdcam.online>



Nestbox builder, Shannon Ramsey, is working with Larry to create a camera ready nestbox. Plans will be available when finalized.

"I'm looking forward to watching—without disturbing—the birds during breeding season. And, reporting to NestWatch."

Neighbors Join To Create New Guadalupe Ranch Estates Eastern Bluebird Trail

report and photos provided by Vickie Van Pelt

Nestled between canyons and the North Fork of the Guadalupe River, in the heart of the Texas Hill Country, is a quiet and secluded setting called Guadalupe Ranch Estates. It is a tranquil and beautiful neighborhood with ranch tracts and homes nicely spaced for privacy. When my husband and I first moved here a little over one year ago we assumed we might never have the chance to meet our neighbors. Well, we assumed wrong. Everyone out here reaches out to everyone else with waves, Social committee meetings, fire pit get togethers and an occasional late night viewing of big bright stars, deep in the heart of Texas. I guess if you don't show up to one of these get togethers then you just aren't very friendly. (LOL)

Anyway, we came from a noisy neighborhood inside the central hub of Austin, Texas. We became accustomed to the screeching sounds of loud motorcycles, horns honking, or the occasional drum beats from one of the South by Southwest concerts at Zilker Park. Although we lived in one of the most desired neighborhoods, Allandale, we came to realize that the tearing down of the old homes next door to us and the new mini-mansions popping up on our street overlooking our backyard wasn't working for us anymore. It was time to move on.

So we packed up all of our belongings and headed West. I grabbed an old, dusty wooden bluebird nestbox that had been sitting in our garage for over 18 years and added it to a box labeled 'garage stuff.' (Yep, I had let it sit there, forever.)

After my husband and I found our place in our new neighborhood, Guadalupe Ranch Estates, I

asked him to mount our old, dusty wooden bluebird nestbox up yonder (that's Western talk) on our little hill. There it was, finally. The bluebird nestbox had found its new home up on that hill. But will they ever come? I wondered if we would be lucky enough to even see a bluebird out here. It turned out that we got lucky. Very lucky, indeed.



Vickie and Jerry drove to Kyle to pick up nestboxes.

In March of 2020 I was birdwatching from my front porch, binoculars raised, watching our Golden-fronted Woodpecker move from tree to tree, the Summer Tanagers gobbling up their hot pepper suet bites and hoping to get a glimpse of a Scott's Oriole or two. I noticed a bird sitting on that old wooden bluebird nestbox on the hill so I focused my binoculars onto the top of that nestbox. To my astonishment, there he was! The most beautiful male Eastern Bluebird I had ever seen in my life. Naturally, I ran into the house, grabbed my Nikon and yelled at my husband to hurry up and get out here to see this.



First bluebird sighted at our new home.

I was hooked. I now knew they were out here so we started setting up more nestboxes throughout our property. It also turns out that we discovered several other species of cavity nesting birds that might benefit from our help so we set up nestboxes specific to that species. We have had 12 Eastern Bluebirds fledge, 7 Great Crested Flycatchers, Bewick's Wrens, Black Crested Titmice, Carolina Chickadees and we're still hoping that the Golden-fronted Woodpeckers will find one of the special nestboxes we placed for them.



Gerry Wolfe



Kristina Casanova

We will rejoice in the mornings as we sip our coffee and will be thrilled in the afternoons as we watch and listen to them fly above in their small flocks. What fun! Beauty galore!



Vicki Van Pelt

Now what do I do? I can't keep this little secret all to myself. It wouldn't be fair to the Eastern Bluebirds. I started reaching out to my neighbors for help and we started an Eastern Bluebird Trail



John Wilson



Terry Wilson

Project in our neighborhood. I decided to give a presentation to my neighbors on this wonderful discovery and all of the neighbors who showed up also became hooked.

The Guadalupe Ranch Estates Brigade

That's it in a nutshell. We are now on our way to attracting more and more Eastern Bluebirds to our neighborhood.



Phillip and Diana Czar

As most of us know, the male Eastern Bluebird finds the nest sites, but it is the female who chooses the nestbox. Mrs. Bluebird has 19 nestboxes to choose from right now. We are planning on expanding the trail in the future.



Karen Taylor



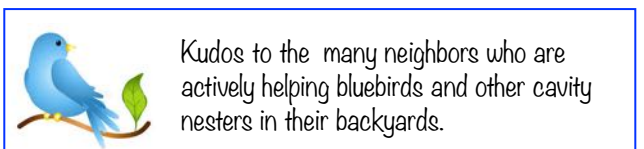
Robin Wheeler

Thanks to the Texas Bluebird Society friends who have educated me and given me advice along the way: Linda Crum, Pauline Tom, Carol Hagemeyer, and LeAnn Sharp.

One more thought:

"If you build it, he will come."

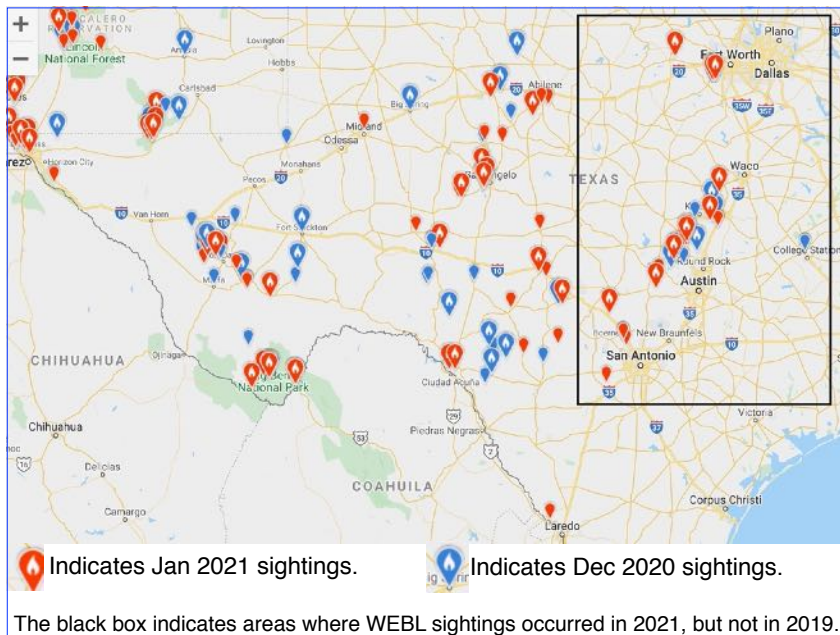
Quote from the whispering voice in Field Of Dreams.



Kudos to the many neighbors who are actively helping bluebirds and other cavity nesters in their backyards.

I am also so thankful for all of my awesome neighbors, for their enthusiasm and many contributions to this project.

eBird Reports Western Bluebirds Wintering Farther East



WEBL male spotted at Belton Lake on December 9, 2020. Photo by Daniel Kelch.

Like the Mountain Bluebirds, drought and fires in the western states may be pushing Western Bluebirds (WEBL) further east than normal to forage for food. This recent eBird map snapshot illustrates the sightings of Western Bluebirds in December 2020 (blue markers), and January

2021 sightings (red markers). This winter there has been an increase in the number of sightings and quantity in their normal range. The black box on the map shows numerous sightings of Western Bluebirds spotted farther to the east than any eBird records from 2019.



This was taken on 12/24 in the field adjacent to my house in Salado. It was part of a group of 7 WEBLs that has been here ever since. Photo by Charlie Plimpton. (Shared 2/1/2021)



Daniel Kelch captured this photo of a male and female Western Bluebirds on a recent visit (Dec 9th) to Belton Lake. Visit [eBird](#) to view where other sightings are occurring around Texas.

2020 State Of The Organization Review

Reported by Pauline Tom, Immediate Past President

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Nestbox Const. Coord.
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Secretary
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Aubrey

THOMAS WHEELER
Abilene

PAUL WICK
Tyler

Contact Us:

tbs@txblues.org

936-439-7114 (Lonnie Castleman)

In Summer 2020, friends pointed me to non-profit organization consultant Corky McReynolds in Oregon. The TBS Board retained Corky to virtually assist in a process that would finally allow me “retirement,” a necessary step for a healthy long-lasting organization. It was the Board’s responsibility to find a new president.

The process Corky outlined (implemented under Nelda Reid) brought in 12 new board members! On December 31, we had a fabulous set of new officers, except for a President.

On January 4, Lonnie Castleman, my dear friend, put aside his qualms and plans to not serve as president ... simply because he loves bluebirds and this organization.

Oh, what a relief for me that Lonnie stepped in. And, oh, what good news for Texas Bluebird Society!

You will love Lonnie. Let me tell you about this man. His first volunteer service, after he joined in February 2016 and attended our Season Kickoff in Bastrop in March, came that April. Lonnie made a trip from Trinity to Palestine to hear me give an evening presentation, and he graciously agreed to man our membership table. He was hooked!

The next time I saw Lonnie, he was in attendance at my mother-in-law’s memorial service in Bellaire. That’s the sort of man Lonnie is.

Lonnie came into leadership just as we ended 2020 with only 194 new members, the fewest since 2006, and fewer than 800 active memberships. For 10 months, Covid stunted TBS’ growth as we had neither festivals nor presentations. Already 2021 festival registrations are opening.

Memberships will jump back! You can help by recruiting new members face-to-face as you share bluebirds with friends and relatives and through FaceBook posts. Please be an ambassador for TBS.

2020 brought our rewrite and publication of the TPWD “Bluebirds in Texas,” a full color booklet we give as a handbook for new members and gift to Life Members. It’s available online, booklet.txblues.org . What an accomplishment!

Texas Bluebird Society has garnered Texas facts and range maps that differ from what is found on some respected websites. We are fortunate to be in place to disseminate factual Texas-specific information.

Over the past 20 years, I’ve been blessed to serve as Texas Bluebird Society became a highly respected organization. TBS started with five when incorporated on September 21, 2001. We have attracted over 7200 (household) memberships and touched countless lives as individuals have seen and experienced the bluebird of happiness.

TBS’ success has been possible only with RonTom by my side, surrounded by many, many volunteer board members and other volunteers including (but not limited to) nestbox distributors, nestbox builders, festival volunteers, TBS events volunteers, newsletter editors, and thousands of individual member volunteers who install at least one (hopefully NestWatch’d) nestbox and/or plant natives that attract insects and provide berries as we are spreading “*Bluebirds Across Texas...one nestbox at a time*” and “*enjoying the process and the bluebirds.*”

HOW DO BIRDS SURVIVE THE GOLD WINTER?

The following is reprinted sialis.org.org



Photo by Karen Pelton

Birds have enough feathers to keep them warm in the winter IF they have enough food and IF they remain dry and out of severe winds. To stay warm, they fluff up their feathers, draw their head in or tuck it under a wing, and shiver. They may

scrunch down by bending their legs, or tuck one foot up under their feathers to further reduce heat loss. They may also huddle together with other birds. During the night, the body temperature of birds like bluebirds and chickadees may drop 10-15 degrees, and their metabolism slows down to conserve energy. (This is called nocturnal hypothermia.)

Sharing heat in a huddle can help bluebirds survive severe cold weather by reducing heat loss. Usually bluebirds roost in a nestbox or cavity by themselves. However, monitors have found 2-20 bluebirds communally roosting in one box. (BNA) The birds usually fan out their heads so they can all breathe. Some monitors have found multiple dead birds in a box, but cannot tell whether they suffocated, or died of another cause like cold or lack of food.

Report Fatalities

Historically, every winter across North America there are accounts of entire families of bluebirds that die in nesting boxes.

Unfortunately, due to the recent Storm URI, there are many reports of finding multiple bluebirds frozen in nestboxes across Texas. TPWD is asking citizens to report all wildlife fatalities to iNaturalist.org

It Is Crucial To Report To NestWatch!

Even *nesting failures* provide critical data. NestWatch correlates location with weather providing invaluable analytical information for all areas of on-going research world-wide.

One Photo Started Everything

story related by Keith Kridler

It does not have to be cold for bluebirds to roost inside nesting boxes at night. The Michael Smith photo was from his home in Maryland. His family of bluebirds went into the same nesting box each night. He set up the photo shoot with camera prefocused, lights preset, went out in the middle of the night, lifted off the top, and shot *one* photo. When Michael started sharing his photo, he had no idea what a profound impact his photo would have.



Photo by Michael L. Smith

Dr. Laurence Zeleny used Michael's photo in his article "Song of Hope for the Bluebird" published in the June 1977 Issue of National Geographic magazine.

Dr. Larry Zeleny received so much mail from this article about bluebirds that he and his friends started the North American Bluebird Society in 1978. My wife Sandy and I were Charter Members. Years later, Pauline and Ron Tom and some of my bluebird friends met and we started the Texas Bluebird Society. In a way, if Michael Smith had not taken these photos for Dr. Larry Zeleny, then NABS, nor the Texas Bluebird Society, would have ever been formed!