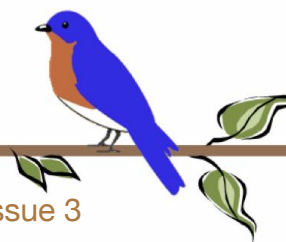


# TEXAS Blues



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Federal law protects all native nesting birds!



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Editor

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## Eastern Screech-Owl (EASO)

*If a mysterious trill catches your attention in the night, bear in mind the spooky sound may come from an owl no bigger than a pint glass. Common east of the Rockies in woods, suburbs, and parks, the Eastern Screech-Owl is found wherever trees are, and they're even willing to nest in backyard nest boxes. These supremely camouflaged birds hide out in nooks and tree crannies through the day, so train your ears and listen for them at night.*

### Habitat

Trees define the Eastern Screech-Owl's habitat. This owl is fairly common in most types of woods (evergreen or deciduous; urban or rural), particularly near water. It shuns treeless expanses of mountains or plains.

### Behavior

Eastern Screech-Owls are active at night and are far more often heard than seen—most bird watchers know this species only from its trilling or whinnying song. However, this cavity-roosting owl can be attracted to nestboxes or, if you're sharp-eyed, spotted in daylight at the entrance to its home in a tree cavity.

Eastern Screech-Owls nest in holes and cavities, but never dig a cavity themselves. Thus, they depend on tree holes opened or enlarged by woodpeckers, fungus, rot, or squirrels. They often occupy abandoned woodpecker nest holes. Eastern Screech-Owls readily accept nest boxes, including those built for Wood Ducks or Purple Martins, and sometimes nest in wood piles, mailboxes, or crates left on the ground.

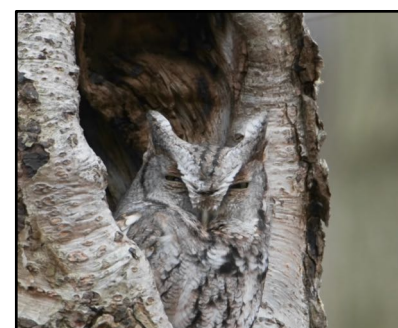
Eastern Screech-Owls readily accept nest boxes; consider putting one up to attract a breeding pair. Make sure you put it up well before breeding season. Attach a guard to keep predators from raiding eggs and young. These owls also use birdbaths and will visit them to drink and bathe. (continued on page 2)



### Adult gray morph (McCall's)

Small, with short ear tufts and a dark bill. Gray overall, with dark vertical streaks and fine barring. Yellow eyes often hard to see during the day. The McCall's form in southern Texas and northern Mexico has a pale bill, and lacks a red morph.

© DeanAnderson Macaulay Library



### Can You See Me?

This cavity-roosting owl can be attracted to nestboxes or, if you're sharp-eyed, spotted in daylight at the entrance to its home in a tree cavity.

© Suzzane Labbe Macaulay Library

Eastern Screech Owl information is reprinted from All About Birds by Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

TheCornellLab

# Cool Facts About Eastern Screech-Owls

## What's For Dinner?

Eastern Screech-Owls eat most kinds of small animals, including birds and mammals as well as surprisingly large numbers of earthworms, insects, crayfish, tadpoles, frogs, and lizards. They eat many kinds of mammals, including rats, mice, squirrels, moles, and rabbits. Small birds taken as prey include flycatchers, swallows, thrushes, waxwings, and finches, as well as larger species such as jays, grouse, doves, shorebirds, and woodpeckers. This owl is agile enough to occasionally prey on bats, and can rarely even be cannibalistic. When prey is plentiful, Eastern Screech-Owls cache extra food in tree holes for as long as four days.

Eastern Screech-Owls are chiefly active at night, though they often hunt at dawn or dusk, and occasionally in daylight. These versatile hunters sit and wait in the trees for prey to pass below. They tend to pounce from perches six to ten feet off the ground, occasionally snatching an insect or bat on the wing or hitting shallow water talons-first to snag fish or tadpoles. Most flights are short (less than 75 feet or so). When traveling between perches, these owls often drop, fly straight, then rise again, in a characteristic U-shaped pattern.

## Raising The Family

Like most raptors, male Eastern Screech-Owls are smaller than females, and are more agile fliers and hunters. The female doesn't hunt while on the nest; she and the chicks depend on food brought them by the male.

Eastern Screech-Owls form stable matches, usually one male with one female but occasionally one male with two females. Males defend small territories containing several cavity roost spots. When nesting, the female stays in the nest hole except for brief dawn and dusk excursions. She and the nestlings are fed by her mate, though it is the female who tears the prey into small bits for the babies.



Eastern Screech-Owls build no nest. The female lays her eggs on whatever debris is at the bottom of her nesting cavity, be it wood-chips, twigs, or the cast-off feathers and droppings from a previous year's nest. Settling in, she makes a body-shaped depression where her eggs lie.

**Number of Broods: 1 brood.**  
**Incubation Period: 27-34 days.**  
**Nestling Period: 26-30 days.**  
**Egg Description: White.**  
**At Hatching: covered in white down; eyes closed.**



Photographer: Betty Rizzotti

At fledging, the young first hop to the ground or nearby branches, using feet and fluttering wings to climb laboriously back to safety. Young gain flight and hunting skills slowly; they depend on their parents for food for 8–10 weeks after fledging. Both parents feed the youngsters at this stage, and adults, especially the females, shelter together with the young in communal tree roosts. Gradually, as the young gain skill, they begin to roost and hunt apart from their parents and siblings.

Eastern Screech-Owls of the suburbs may fledge more young than their rural counterparts, probably because their predators are scarcer in the suburbs.

## Houston Audubon Society



Eastern Screech-Owl, red morph.  
©Alan Murphy

Eastern Screech-Owls are the most common owl in Houston. Very small (8" - 9"), they have two color morphs: gray and red, with gray being the most common. They are best seen in the early evening or pre-dawn hours. Their call is long, descending quavering whinny. A second call is a long, low trill. They are relatively

tame and curious, and have been known to follow evening strollers out of curiosity.

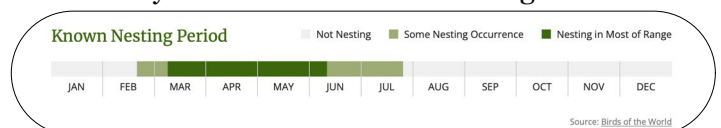
## Do You Have Trees?



Eastern Screech-Owl, Red Morph Photo © Kurt Hasselman

With the right habitat you can enjoy watching a family of Eastern Screech-Owls in your own backyard. You can buy an owl nestbox from a variety of stores and online sources. Or, build your own. [Nestbox plans](#) and instructions are available on [NestWatch](#).

Make sure you install well before nesting season starts.



# The Flemings Share Their Backyard Babies



*Dad scouts nesting sites and Mom has made the final decision. Pairs will often use the same nest site in consecutive years.*



**Although Dad doesn't share nesting duty, he is the main food provider for Mom and chicks.**

**The young "peep" for food during the first three weeks, then chatter or hum later.**



*Why are we called screech-owls?*

**Their voices are whinnies and soft trills, they do not screech.**



*Hmm, do I really want to go out there?*

My husband, Johnny, and I have wood duck boxes by our pond at our home in Orange, Texas. One evening while sitting on the dock, we saw movement in one of them. It was not a duck, it was a squirrel peeking out at us. Each day when we went to the pond, it would poke its little head out and look at us. Eventually, there were two squirrels peeking out.

This gave Johnny the idea to build some boxes for the squirrels. He built two boxes and installed them in our front yard. However, those boxes did not attract the squirrels, they attracted Screech Owls. For the last 2 years, we have had a Screech Owl nest in each box. This year we were fortunate enough to see the owlets.

Johnny and I have been interested in bluebirds for approximately 21 years. One day in the Spring of 2001, I caught a glimpse of a small blue bird going into a decorative birdhouse hanging in a cedar tree outside of our kitchen window. I did not know what kind of bird this was, so I asked Johnny to come look at it. He informed me that it was a bluebird. I was so intrigued. I watched out the window as much as I could watching it come and go.

One day I was reading our local newspaper and saw this small add in the classifieds. It was information about Texas Bluebird Society. Johnny and I joined in 2001 (member #69). Since then, we have served on the board, hosted booths at local events, attended as many symposiums as possible, and have truly enjoyed the numerous bluebird families that have chosen to nest in our backyard.

Article and photos by Jennifer Hudson Fleming, Orange, Texas.



*Mom, I see daylight out there. I thought we were nocturnal!*

**The screech-owls are the most strictly nocturnal of all North American owls.**



*My 30 days in the nest are up, I go tonight!*

**Owls begin incubation when the first egg is laid. Therefore, eggs hatch at different times, and fledging can occur at different times.**



*This is it, I'm gonna fly!*

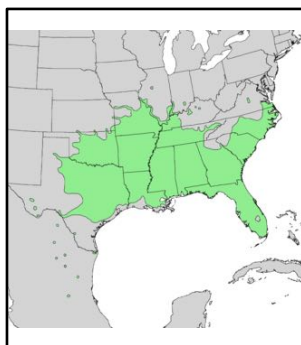
# *Celtis laevigata* – Southern hackberry

By Linda Crum, Master Gardener/Master Naturalist



*The bark of the hackberry tree has an unusual warty appearance.*

*Hackberry is the larval host of the Hackberry Emperor butterfly.*



Found on a wide range of soils east of the Rockies from southern Canada to Florida, these trees thrive in a broad span of temperatures and on sites that vary from 14 to 60" of annual rainfall.

Southern hackberry or sugar hackberry is a sixty to eighty-foot deciduous tree with drooping branches and a broad rounded open crown. It prefers moist, well-drained soil so it will often be found on banks of streams. The four-inch leaves are alternate on the branches. Blooms are green turning white at maturity. Drupes or berries follow, relished by several species of birds. The fruits are edible and sweet – the taste is similar to that of dates – but the seed is large and covered only by a thin layer of flesh..

Propagation is by seeds or cuttings from juvenile wood or root sprouts or suckers. When propagating from seed, plant seed in fall or stratify seed 60 to 90 days at 41 degrees and plant in spring.

Fairly insect and disease resistant, it can have hackberry nipple gall that disfigures the leaves but does not harm the tree. Scale insects can be controlled by horticultural oil.



Hackberry Emperor Butterfly

The hackberry flowers grow in clusters in the spring. Their beautiful white colors in contrast to the dark green hues of the leaves attract many butterflies and birds. These trees play host to the Hackberry Emperor Butterfly larve as well as the Snout butterfly, which lays its eggs among the foliage.

Apart from butterflies, these trees also attract fauna, ring-necked pheasant, quail, wild turkey, prairie chicken, robins, cedar waxwing, deer, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and other small mammals. The tree relies on these little critters to eat and then disperse the seeds in order to reproduce.

Three species of hackberry grow in the South Texas Plains. Each produces an edible fruit and strong, flexible wood utilized by the native populations. The most widespread of these three species is the small desert hackberry (*Celtis pallida* Torr.), also known as granjen\_o or spiny hackberry . It is a common upland shrub, especially in the central section of the South Texas Plains, where it is co-dominant with mesquite. The other two trees, sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata* Willd.) and netleaf hackberry (*Celtis reticulata* Torr.) grow along fence lines and roadsides but the tallest examples usually are confined to river or creek courses and better-watered, low lying areas of the South Texas Plains.



*Hackberry was used by several native American tribes. The Houma Indians made a concentrate of the bark to treat sore throats. It was also used to treat venereal disease.*

# Members Share Their Backyard Beauties



*Hey, we're still hungry!*  
Photo by Kristi Robeson, Forney, TX.



*My friend a few streets over has eight bluebird eggs for the first time. She's always had between five and seven before. I've always had five in all my boxes. Patricia Nunn Clowdus Southlake, Texas.*



*Doesn't matter where you live, all fledglings want fed!*  
Photo by Sharon Wiggins, Warrington, VA.



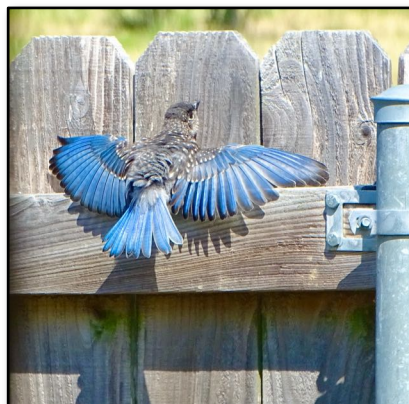
*Thanks, love the mealworms!*  
Photo by David Kinneer Fredericksburg, VA.



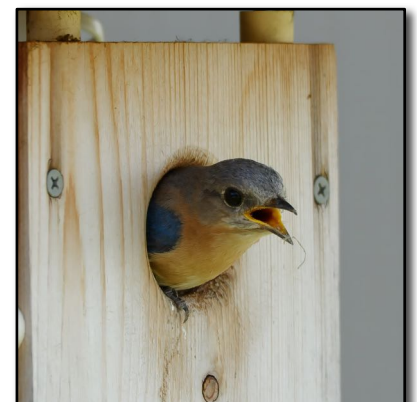
*Larry Melamed shares his photos of another bluebird family in Little Elm, TX.*



*This is a busy Mom! Still feeding the first fledglings and already laying eggs for second brood. Photo by Maryann Parks Prine, College Station, TX.*



*So, this Eastern Bluebird fledgling took a dip in the birdbath.... then sat in a sunny spot to dry his wings. The wings were dry in a matter of seconds and off he flew. Photo by Maryann Parks Prine, College Station, TX.*



*I think they are asking for more mealworms.*

**Great nesting videos on our Facebook page, go take a LOOK!**



Other groups to explore on Facebook:

Bluebird Anonymous

Bluebird-L

Bluebird Landlords

Bluebird Photo Sharing Group



*Styrofoam cooler and an ice pack help reduce the heat inside the nestbox. Photo by Wendy W. Lime.*



When you do not have afternoon shade for your nestbox, improvise!



*An umbrella sure helps. Photo by Jennifer Hudson Fleming, Orange, TX.*



**Other Options:**

Paint the exterior (only) a light color.



Install a heat shield. **Plans available**



Provide water.



**Super Spooker**

*So far, this spooker has kept 35 of 35 broods safe from first egg laid on day one to fledging.*

*The streamers are attached directly in front of the entrance, instead of over the roof.*

*Photo by Moria Schilke*



*Checking the nest. Photo by Maryann Parks, Prine College Station, TX.*

Radhika sent a letter to the North America Bluebird Society (NABS) praising their book *Get To Know Bluebirds*. She reiterated how helpful it was for her 8 year old son, Arjun, who is currently monitoring/reporting a nestbox on NestWatch. NABS printed the letter in the summer issue of their magazine, *Bluebird*. The editor also added a note mentioning Arjun's love of wildlife photography and included two of Arjun's photos from the Valley Ranch Green Club nestbox installation iarticle in the March *TX Blues*.

Download [Get To Know Bluebirds: A Guide For Young Nature Lovers](#) for your own kids or grandkids.



*Second nest, only two eggs hatched so far. Photo by Arjun Jenigiri, Irving, TX.*



*Sometimes the eggs are plain white instead of blue. Normally, color (pigment) is added to the eggshell from cells/glands in the wall of the female's oviduct (the passage along which eggs travel). When there is no pigment, the eggs are white.*



Thanks for Sharing

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Nestbox Const. Coord.  
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Vice President  
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**Steve Watkins**  
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**Thomas Wheeler**  
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Contact Us:  
[tbs@txblues.org](mailto:tbs@txblues.org)



## Welcome New Members

- Diane Asberry
- Kimberly Bikoski
- Daphne Carter
- Gayle Clendennen
- Lauren Coffman
- Mary Beth Coleman
- Nancy Cotts
- Jacqueling Cummins
- Cindy Day
- Billy Dyess
- Joseph Eakin
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- Leslie Fight
- Fort Worth Academy
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- Alena Tatum
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- Ryan Tucker
- Renee Valencia
- Brigid Walls
- Lucille Wellborn
- Suzanne Werley
- Mary White

## We Appreciate Our Volunteers!

Lonnie Castleman  
Jon Hranicky  
Linda James  
Bill Johnson  
Susie Johnson  
Harold Latham  
Archie Manning  
Roberta Marshall  
Jerald Mowery  
Dee Myers  
John Park  
Shannon Ramsey  
Judy Ray  
Ken Ray  
Nelda Reid  
Pauline Tom  
Ron Tom



Harld Latham shares bluebird information with attendees at the 38th Annual Tomato Festival held June 11th in downtown Jacksonville. Harld shared booth hosting duties with Pauline and Ron Tom and Debbie Tugwell.

## Thank You For Your Donations

James K Floyd	Larry Pettit
Lee Ann Foulger	G. Emil Riedel
Karen Gradel	Mary Lou Rizzo
Metha Haggard	David Thomas
Meredith Henthorn	Edwina Thomas
Dianne Hodge	Ben Tobias
Bruce & Vickie Houff	Phyllis Tobias
Gloria Kaminski	Terri Tyrrell
David & Ora Keetley	Jane Weil
Sheryl Marquez	Paula Wickham
Andrew Nankas	



## Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

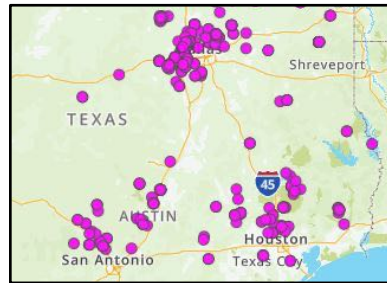
### Be On The NestWatch Map!



NestWatch is a nationwide citizen science network hosted and monitored by Cornell University ornithologists. TBS encourages its members to report all nesting behavior and outcomes through NestWatch. Monitors all over Texas report bluebird data. (map below)

*Your NestWatch observations provide data for scientists and ornithological research.*

*2022 NestWatch map of EABL monitored nesting sites in TX.*



### Thank You Citizen Scientist!

In the Fort Worth area a dedicated group of nestbox monitors have been reporting Eastern Bluebird data for over a decade. Jim Marshall began Project Bluebird in 2007 with a few nestboxes along the Trinity River. In 2022 Project Bluebird has 14 monitors who check nestboxes weekly and send data to Jim's sister **Roberta Marshall** who enters it into NestWatch. (Roberta is on the TBS Board.) These monitors are: **Claudia Blalock, Betsy Booth, Maryann Coleridge, Cindy Compton, Simianne Hayden, Jacqueline Kerr, MaryBeth Lampe, Mike Mc Nerney, Jan Marshall, Jody Morris, Mike Morris, Laurie Raulerson, Paul Roach, and Steve Smith.**

In addition to nestboxes NestWatched by Project Bluebird, over thirty boxes at Pecan Valley Golf Course in Benbrook (west of Fort Worth) and in the Benbrook Corps of Engineers' park are monitored by **Bill and Susie Johnson**. Another monitor in the Benbrook area is **Donna Honkomp**. In Arlington **Donna Piercy** monitors a bluebird trail. There are also monitors just north of Fort Worth, including our nestbox distributor, **Sharon Miggins**, in Aubrey.

Put your bluebirds on the map by registering and monitoring your nestbox at NestWatch.org. Get the whole family involved. It is fun, easy and rewarding!

### Take Photos And Enter Data At The Nestbox

Have you tried the NestWatch app?

Upload nest photos!

Download the free NestWatch app today!

Record your nest data with the tap of a finger.

Find us on Google Play or the App Store!

★★★★★  
"It's so much nicer having the mobile app than having to enter [data] into a computer."  
—Ryan, Google Play Review

GET IT ON Google Play | Download on the App Store

Entering data from the field using the NestWatch app is quick and easy.

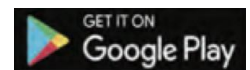
NestWatch also provides access to nesting data to create reports from both your personal account or by state.

Roberta confirms. "Set up of a nestbox site and entering data in NestWatch is easy. Reports can be entered from a desktop in a single entry format or as a table. Or, use the mobile app!"

Date	Eggs	Live young	Dead young	Nest status
May 12, 2022	3	0	0	
May 24, 2022	3	0	0	
May 31, 2022	3	0	0	

End attempt | Add visit

Download App from



*Example of one of the NestWatch mobile app screens used to enter nesting data on your phone while you are actively observing at the nestbox.*