

# TEXAS Blues



Texas Bluebird Society Newsletter ▪ Volume 9, Issue 2

Bats and even flying squirrels enjoy the warmth of a nestbox during cold weather.



Photo by LeAnn Sharp

Q. Who else visits your nestbox?  
A. See page 4 & 5!

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## Nestboxes—Expect The Unexpected

By LeAnn Sharp

When we look into our nestboxes of course we expect to find Eastern Bluebird nests, beautiful blue eggs or their young. Though on our trail we usually see an over abundance of Ash-Throated Flycatchers nesting. We are always happy to open a nestbox and also find the nests, tiny eggs and young of other small cavity nesting birds such as Carolina Chickadee, Black-crested Titmouse, Bewick's Wren, and Downy Woodpecker. People in other areas of Texas may also find Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren or Western Bluebirds in their nestboxes. Those with nestboxes from College Station to East Texas may also find the yellow Prothonotary Warblers in their nestboxes. Any species of cavity nesting birds are welcome in our nestboxes; except the dreaded *House Sparrows*. These are not native and they are harmful to the native birds; it's ok to trap and dispatch of these bad birds. (House Sparrow Spookers and Trap info is located on the TBS web site).

Any native cavity nesting bird is fun to watch just like the Bluebirds are. These other birds need cavities to nest in, so they need our help too. Therefore you should not remove their nests from your nestbox until they are finished nesting and their fledglings have left the nest. Bluebirds can and will build several nests each season, sometimes nesting thru July or August. If you have some of these other birds in your nestbox, you could still attract bluebirds after these birds have finished nesting.

One of the Bluebird Programs I give is titled, *Be Aware No Tellin' What's in There!* When monitoring and opening our nestboxes I have been surprised by a mouse a few times; they like to build their messy nests in there too. And once I startled a Golden-fronted Woodpecker, actually we startled each other. I still can't figure out how he squeezed through that small 1½" hole. Fortunately, I've never opened a nestbox to find a snake, but some people have. Nestboxes in East Texas are also a favorite spot for Flying Squirrels to nest. But since 2006 I have been finding Bats in my nestboxes, that's right Bats! Most of the bats found were Cave Myotis; a few have been Mexican Free-tailed Bats. I've found as few as one in a nestbox, or as many as ten bats together. So I started monitoring and recording our bats too; I've found bats in the nestboxes in the fall and winter. The timing makes me think they are finding the nestboxes as resting spots in-between summer and winter sites during fall and spring migration. We leave our nestboxes up year around so wintering bluebirds could use them to stay warm if need be. And I was happy to find that we were providing shelter for the bats as well. That is until I started finding bats in them in March when the birds were supposed to start building nests. So we put up bat houses, and within two weeks the bats moved into their new shelters. I still find an occasional bat in my bluebird nestboxes, but I just make sure we have plenty of nestboxes up for everyone!

All NATIVE birds are protected by law. House Sparrows and Starlings are NOT!

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Visit our website  
[www.txblues.org](http://www.txblues.org)

**THANKS, Volunteers Are Appreciated!**

Hosting a booth at an event, giving a presentation, building nestboxes, answer a question, stuffing an envelope or hauling supplies—everything that happens in and for TBS is thanks to a volunteer! TBS is always looking for a volunteer to help out with "chores."

*Share your expertise, contact our president, Pauline Tom, at [pauline@texasbluebirdsociety.org](mailto:pauline@texasbluebirdsociety.org)*

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*Jennifer finishes set up while hubby Johnny Fleming snaps the photo at the Red Bud Festival in Buna.*

*Hosting a booth is a little work and a lot of FUN!*

*Or, maybe you would like to join in a nestbox building workshop in Conroe.*

**Volunteers are always needed and always appreciated!**



From L to R Fred Crum, Bob Scamman, Paula Santagata, and Bob Ramey.

**Welcome New Members**

David Adams-BA, The Woodlands-JA, Tomball-Diann Bailey-Alice Bailey-TB, Waxahachie-Emily Baize IB, Houston-Margie Barlow-Vickie Barron-Caroline Bayer-Dennis Bell-Jim Binford-Elizabeth Birkinshaw-Jack Bogle-Charles Brown-Mae Brown-RB, Tomball-Mary Burns-Julie Campbell-Janiece Carter-Robert Church-Lynda Cimera-Rhonda Clement-Jeanne Colgate-LC, Waxahachie-Darryl & Barbara Couvillion-KC, Enchanted Oaks-Barbara Cutler-MD, Maypearl-KD, San Antonio-LD, The Woodlands-Becky Dominick-CD, Tomball-Don Dozier-Janet Drake-DE, Hempstead-GE, Bryan-JF, Tomball-AF, Midlothian-Barbara Grizzle-Glenda Gundermann-Fred Gundermann-Barbara Gundermann-TH, Mabank-MH, Athens-SH, Magnolia-JH, Lavernia-Ginny Hester-CH, Conroe-PH, Grandview-Shirley Holmesly-Sita Hood-SJ, Waller-Ruth Jilka-Moe Johnson-Glodene Jones-MK, Waxahachie-Karen Kawszan-SK, Kemp-Carol Klocek-Karen Kurland-KL, Kemp-Gene Leroy-Yvonne Love-DM, Gun Barrel City-Ann McMaster-RM, Austin-DM, Midlothian-Keith Mullins-Mary Munro-Paul Nelson-Andrea Newman-SN, Waxahachie-Joan Outlaw-AP, Kemp-JP, The Woodlands-Homer Phillips-BR, Conroe-MR, Athens-Gail B. Rapoza-Dianne Ray-KR, Willis-Bette Remmert-RR, Cypress-DR, Waxahachie-LR, Cypress-TR, Mabank-Cindy Roberts-JR, Mabank-Dennis Samoska-RS, Magnolia-MS, Midlothian-DS, Kirbyville-David Scott-GS, Savannah-Donna Shirley-SS, Palmer-BS, Riesel-CS, Spring-DS, Magnolia-David Stansbury-Marlene Stidston-Patricia Strassle-MS, Mabank-RT, Warren-TC, Enchanted Oaks-Shelia Tidwell-Ann Tinsley-Mary Tyler-DU, Conroe-RW, Waxahachie-John Wolcott-Toni Wood-SW, Midlothian-RW, Palmer-Lisa Yalenick-Cindy Yandell *If you did not check "Publish Name" on the membership application, initials and city are used.*

**Donation\$ TBS thanks the following donors for their financial support:**

Bird Watcher's Digest	Jo Ann Graves	Anna Perry
LeeAnn Badum	Kirsti Harms	Charles & Jackie Post
Anne Cassidy	Sita Hood	Larry Rankin
Roger Clark	R L Langley	Dave Redden
Charles & Marilyn Eppler	Barb Lytle	David Shiels
Harry Evans	Julie McCants	Judy Worthy

Mabank Garden Club for the presentation by David Shiels

*Question:*

I have observed a pair of Bluebirds going into and out of my Bluebird Box in the back yard for several weeks but no nest until I found a nest in the box this morning. My Wife advised me she had seen a "small black headed bird" come out of the box and come to our feeder. I watched the box and sure enough a Chickadee flew out of the box and appears to have been building on the nest.

I removed the nest and cleaned the box as best I could. I wonder if you can tell me of anything else I should do to keep the Chickadees from nesting there and encourage the Bluebirds to build there again. I had Bluebirds last season and they had laid 3 eggs when a Raccoon tore out the nest and broke the eggs. Jim G.

*Answer:*

*A Carolina Chickadee is a wonderful little bird. The bird and her nest are protected by law. Once she's finished nesting, then the nestbox will be available for more nestings – with bluebirds or other native cavity-nesting birds.*

*I suggest putting up another nestbox nearby. Bluebirds nest peacefully near nestboxes in use by other species. If you mount the nestbox on ¾-inch EMT conduit, that will cut down on likelihood of a raccoon reaching the nest. Too, a baffle made from stovepipe or PVC could be added. Our website has some details. (Pauline Tom)*

*Question:*

My question regards House Sparrows, and I don't think I've seen this exactly addressed. We have bluebird pair trying to nest. There's a house sparrow sitting on the electrical line above them. Every time I drive by and check, the bluebirds have "possession" but the House Sparrow is there. I'm assuming I don't want to insert the Van-Ert trap yet since I don't want to discourage the bluebirds, but I don't want the sparrow to kill them either. Any thoughts on timing? Many thanks, Melanie W.

*Answer:*

*Sounds like the House Sparrow is not interfering with the bluebird nesting. You could set up another nestbox nearby on a higher pole to attract (and trap) the House Sparrow. If you put some feathers in the hole, that could speed the process. Once the House Sparrow claims the nestbox, you can set the VanErt trap. Go to [www.vanerttraps.com](http://www.vanerttraps.com) and follow instructions. ( Pauline Tom)*

**NO, NOT WANTED!**

*Funnel-shaped entrance is characteristic of House Sparrow nests. It will contain grass, weeds and trash.*

*If seen, immediately remove nest; If possible destroy the house sparrow. It's legal!*

**Upcoming Events: Saturday June 12th**

21st Annual Blueberry Festival	Milam County Nature Festival
8:00am—4:00pm	All Day Event
Downtown Area	Wilson Ledbetter Park
Nacogdoches, TX 75961	(FM160) Cameron, TX 76520

**Save This Date!**

**Saturday, August 14th**  
2010 Summer  
Bluebird Symposium

New Henderson Civic Center  
At Lake Forest Park  
Henderson, TX 75652

**Complete Registration form on page 7**

## Who's Sleeping In Your Nestbox?

### CAROLINA CHICKADEE (*Poecile carolinensis*)



Courtesy of Cornell Ornithology Lab, photo by Linda Green



Photo by LeAnn Sharp



Photo by LeAnn Sharp

The **Carolina Chickadee** is a frequent guest in a bluebird nestbox. Only 4¾" long, with a 7¾" wingspan, it is gray above and white below with black cap and bib and white cheeks. Carolina Chickadees are found in woods, farmland and suburbs. Frequent visitors to the feeder they favor sunflower seeds which they hold in feet and crack open. They also acrobatically move through the trees to catch insects. Carolina Chickadees

flock in the winter and separate into pairs for breeding.

A Carolina Chickadee will excavate a cavity in a dead tree, use an old or abandoned woodpecker hole, or a nestbox. Nests are made of dry or green mosses, bark strips or chips, hair/fur from cattle or other small mammals, feathers, plant down, even human hair with a "cup" center to hold the eggs.

Carolina Chickadees lay 6-8 smooth, non-glossy eggs, white with reddish brown spots concentrated at the larger end. Egg size is .62" x .49". One egg is laid per day. Incubation is 11-12 days. Fledge in 13-17 days. Carolina Chickadees raise 1-2 broods per year.

Note: Chickadees are prone to early fledging if disturbed. Stop opening nestbox after day 10 or 11.

### BLACK CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*) or TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*)



Photos courtesy of Cornell Ornithology Lab James Giroux and Gerrit Vyn

The **Black Crested Titmouse** (left) is a true Texan, residing only in South, Central and West Texas. Its kissing cousin, the **Tufted Titmouse** (below left) is a common site all over the eastern US. Both birds are 6½" in length with a 9¾" wingspan. Relatively short tailed, with a pointed crest, gray all over with orange flanks. The Tufted Titmouse only has black on the forehead; the Black crested Titmouse has a black crest.

The Titmouse builds its nest with leaves, grasses, bark, fur, mosses, cotton, wool, feathers, and hair. One egg is laid per day for a total of 4-6 eggs. These eggs approximate .70" x .50", roughly the size of a dime. They are white or creamy, speckled with fine dots of browns, chestnut reds, purple, or lilac wreaths at the larger end. Incubation is 13-14 days. Fledge in 15-18 days. Black Crested and Tufted Titmouse raise They raise one to two broods per year.

As part of courtship the male feeds the female while she quivers her wings and gives high pitched notes. This mate-feeding continues through nest building and the incubation phase. Like other small birds the Titmouse collects in large family flocks for the winter, separating again for the nesting season



Black Crested Titmouse, our own Texas resident. Nest above, and top view of eggs below. Photos by LeAnn Sharp



Black-crested Titmouse was lumped with Tufted Titmouse in 1983, but regained full species status in 2002.

## Other Cavity-Nesting Friends!

### CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)



Photos courtesy of Cornell Ornithology Lab

Singing one of the loudest songs per volume of bird, the Carolina Wren is only 6" with a wingspan of 7½". Warm brown above, rich buff below, it has a prominent white eyebrow. Tail is often seen pointing up.

Nests are bulky with plant fibers, grasses, feathers, pine needles,

and old snakeskin. Eggs are a white/creamy color and heavily decorated with large reddish-brown spots. Eggs are approximately .80" x .60" in size and a clutch is 4-6 eggs. Incubation and fledging is 12-14 days. Carolina Wrens lay two to three broods per year. Fun to watch on a lazy summer day!

### ASH THROATED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus cinerascens*)



Photos by LeAnn Sharp

The **Ash Throated Flycatcher** favors the hotter drier area found in central and west Texas. Also seen in open woodlands, and brush and wooded streams. Length is 8½" with a 12" wingspan, this larger bird can still squeeze into a nestbox. It is crested, grayish-brown upper parts, pale gray breast with a pale yellow belly.

Flying from a perch, the Ash Throated Flycatcher chases aerial insects for dinner.

Nest is made of rootlets, grasses, weeds, and manure. The "cup" portion is lined with feathers, hair, and often rabbit hair. Only occasionally is a snake skin used.

Creamy white with sparse dark streaks and blotches, these eggs measure .88"x .68".

Both the male and female incubate the eggs for 14-16 days with babies fledging in the same 14-16 day period.

### BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryothorus bewickii*)

A sleek wren with a white eyebrow, long tail marked with black and white underneath. Length is 5¼ inches with a 7¼ inch wingspan.



Photo by Eric Isley

The Bewick's Wren feeds on the ground, in trees and bushes, eating insects and spiders. Found in thickets, brush, and open woodlands in rural or suburban areas.

Nesting materials are large compact mass of grasses, plant fibers, twigs, bark strips, cup lined with soft materials such as mosses, feathers, hairs, and snakeskin. The nest is strong and symmetrical with a deep well constructed cup. Measuring 1.0" x .75", eggs are white cream, or tan background with brownish mottling concentrated at the larger end. A clutch can be as small as 4 or as large as 11 eggs. Bewick's Wrens incubate and fledge in 14 days. Broods 1-2.

*The Bewick's Wren is named after Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) an English ornithologist.*



Photo by John Cys



Photo by John Park

#### Did you know...

Bluebirds, like many other birds, are altricial; meaning hatched with eyes closed, with little or no down, incapable of departing from the nest, and fed by the parents.

It comes from a Latin root meaning "to nourish" a reference to the need for extensive parental care required before fledging.

## Musings From The Master... Too Cold, Too Warm, Or Just Right?



**Keith Kridler**, everyone's resident expert, our favorite speaker, and cofounder of TBS, participates in several List-Serve groups focusing on bluebirds and their behavior. Keith has given us permission to publish his contributions to these groups. This is an edited excerpt from Bluebird-L.

**"Only the female bluebird has a bare belly during breeding season or what is commonly called a brood patch."**

Texas seldom has cold temperatures long enough when the bluebirds are laying eggs and raising their young to have losses due to hypothermia. In Texas, heat is a major issue in mid to late summer and many baby bluebirds die when temperatures get too high.

Wood nestboxes have almost no R-value or resistance to heat and cold transfer from the outside of the box to the inside where the young are located.

Baby bluebirds do not produce any of their own body heat for about the first 6-8 days as all energy from the foods they are fed go into producing bone and tissue. During this time they lack the capability of crawling up and out of the nestcup. The baby birds are naked or nearly so during this time.

Only the female bluebird has a bare belly during breeding season or what is commonly called a brood patch. (See photo below) The female must produce enough body heat for her own metabolism and also she must transfer her excess body heat through the brood patch then through the nearly bare skin of her multiple young keeping their body temperature up around 100°(F) for them to be able to function. In northern climes if they get too cold while she is out hunting for insects to feed them, they will quickly become lethargic and unable to raise their heads and beg for food. Texas seldom has cold temperatures long enough when the bluebirds are laying eggs and raising their young to have losses due to hypothermia. In Texas, heat is a major issue in mid to late summer and many baby bluebirds die when temperatures get too high.

OK, your nestbox made from 3/4" thick wood will have an R-Value of less than 1. The normal thermal pane windows on your house have an R-Value of 1>2 or close enough for a simple experiment.

Just for fun stand about five feet from one of your windows on a cold day and hold your hand out

facing the window. Make SURE your hand is as warm as your main body. OK, now pretend your fingers are cold blooded baby bluebirds and walk closer to the cold window glass until your fingers are within about 1" of the glass and NOTICE just how much colder your fingers get the closer to the glass you get. How close did your hand get to the glass before you noticed a difference in temperature? The cold window pane is sucking the heat out of your hand faster than your heart can move hot blood from your core body to your finger tips.

Baby bluebirds have very little body mass. As they get larger and out-grow the nestcup, some are forced up and over the rim of the nestcup, and are forced up against the insides of the nestboxes.

In building construction you want to have at LEAST 3/4" dead air space or 3/4" separation between the outside building materials and your multiple insulation layers to keep down the amount of heat and cold from passing through or radiating in or out of your house. Thermal pane windows are much better with a small air space between the panes of glass than just doubling the thickness of a single

sheet of glass.

By the time baby bluebirds are large enough to outgrow their nestcups they are producing some or most of their own body heat and they are now capable of moving around and shifting places with siblings to take advantage of a warmer or cooler spot inside a nestbox. By being able to move around a nest containing five baby bluebirds can now share body heat from all of the siblings.

Hot sun in summer shining on the walls or ceiling of a nestbox create a similar situation where the west wall of a nestbox can easily radiate heat into the nestbox. The further away the baby birds can move from a hot side the cooler they will be. Adult bluebirds do not carry in water for their young to drink if they dehydrate.

Permission to reprint photo from  
**Hilton Pond Center for  
Piedmont Natural History**  
[www.hiltonpond.org](http://www.hiltonpond.org)

**"Blowing on her belly feathers revealed a well developed brood patch; devoid of feathers, infused with blood vessels, bare skin underlaid by a soft cushion of watery fluid."**  
**Bill Hilton Jr.**



Brood Patch on female Eastern Bluebird. Photo by Bill Hilton, Jr

# 2010 Bluebird Symposium in Henderson (with Silent Auction Fundraiser)



**Saturday, August 14, 2010**  
New Civic Center at Lake Forrest Park  
1005 Hwy 64W, Henderson, TX 75652

**9:00 AM – 2:30 PM**  
**Doors open at 8:30 for Registration and Silent Auction**

**Keith Kridler**  
*How, What & Why? Eastern Bluebirds*

**Greg Grant**  
*The Hole Truth: East Texas Woodpeckers*

**Other Topics include:**

- Bluebird Basics
- Recordkeeping with Cornell's "Nestwatch"
- House Sparrow Control

Advance Registration \$10, includes Hot Lunch

Early Bird Registration Bonus: Register by July 1, 2010, and receive 10 chances for door prize.

Advance registration ends July 31, 2010, and receive 1 chance for door prize.

At door registration (No Lunch and No Door Prizes) \$6.00.

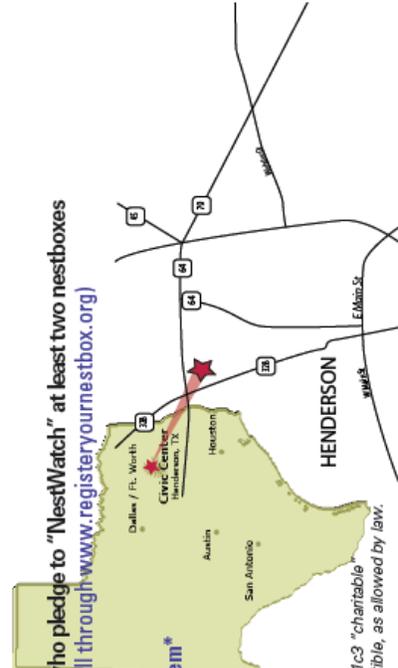
Baymont Inn (903.657.7900) offers \$92 rate for 2 queens or a king with hot breakfast. Ask for "Bluebird Symposium Rate."

**Nestbox Specials:**

**FREE Nestbox to members who pledge to "NestWatch" at least two nestboxes**  
(submit observations to Cornell through [www.registeryournestbox.org](http://www.registeryournestbox.org))

**For More Information or To Donate a Silent Auction Item\***

Andrea Brown  
TBS Summer Symposium  
3689 State Hwy 43 E.  
Henderson, TX 75652  
903.658.0026



\*TBS is recognized by the IRS as a 501c3 "charitable" organization. Donations are tax deductible, as allowed by law.

Donations received after July 31st will miss the publication deadline.

**PRE-Registration (includes hot lunch)**  
**Registrant #1**

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

**Registrant #2** (provide information only if different from above)

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

# Registrants (Please circle)	Description	Cost
1	2 Member	\$10
1	2 I/We WILL join at event	\$10
1	2 I/We do NOT plan to join	\$10
Total Due:		

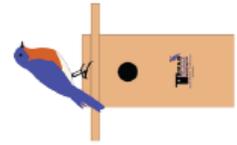
\* \$15 Membership at this event includes free nestbox! Register as "New Member" and bring membership payment to the event.

Cash  Check

**For Planning Purposes Only (This is not a firm commitment for membership. Please do not send membership dues now.)**

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

Do you plan to participate?  Yes  No  N/A



**Mail Registration Form with Payment (\$10.00 per registrant) made payable to "Texas Bluebird Society" to:**

Andrea Brown  
TBS Summer Symposium  
3689 State Hwy 43 E.  
Henderson, TX 75652





This newsletter of the Texas Bluebird Society is published four times a year.

Send street or email address changes to Caryn Brewer at: records@texasbluebirdsociety.org or send to our P.O. Box.

Bluebirds Across Texas ... one nestbox at a time

**August 14th**  
**2010 Summer Symposium**  
**Registration Form Inside!**  
**Reserve your space today**  
**See Page 7**



Texas Bluebird Society  
 PO Box 40868  
 Austin TX 78704

Non-Profit  
 U.S. Postage Paid  
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 Buda, TX 78610

Return Service Requested



Baby Bluebirds  
 Hatched 4-13-10  
 Box # 1

Hatched on 4/13, Don Lawrence, Whitesboro, TX, shares his photo of new bluebird babies in his nestbox; just 3 hours old!

Bluebirds have been added to NestCams at Cornell Labs.  
 View activity inside the nestbox!  
[www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)



# NestWatch

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

## NestWatch Your NestBox!

While visiting your nestboxes be sure to record the nesting activity you have observed.

Enter this data at [www.nestwatch.org](http://www.nestwatch.org)

### Data elements to record:

- Date
- Time
- # of Eggs
- # of Live Young
- # of Dead Young
- Nest Status
- Adult Activity
- Management Activity
- Observer
- Comments

The screenshot shows the NestWatch web interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: HOME, ABOUT, INSTRUCTIONS, MY NESTS, EXPLORE DATA, FOCAL SPECIES, COMMUNITY, HELP. Below the tabs, the user is logged in as 'My Nests > Backyard1 > New nest attempt'. The main heading is 'Enter nest visits for Backyard1'. There are 'Cancel' and 'Submit' buttons. Below that, there is a 'Year & Species' section with a dropdown for 'Year 2009' and a search box for 'Species'. A 'Data entry instructions' link is provided. The main part of the form is a grid for recording nest visits. The grid has columns for Date (MM/DD), Time, #Eggs, #Live young, #Dead young, Nest status, Adult activity, Young status, Mgmt. activity, Observer, Comments, and Delete. There are several rows of data entry fields. Below the grid is an 'Add Another Row' button. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for 'This attempt is finished and now I want to enter or edit my summary calculations.' and a text area for 'Why do you think this nest failed or succeeded?'.

**IMPORTANT:**  
[Be Sure To Summarize!](#)  
 Click box and follow instructions

**WE WANT TO KNOW!**

The fall newsletter will be all about our members. Share your pictures, stories, experiences and new "things" you have tried this year to baffle the predators. Please send your entries to editor@texasblues.org

Submission deadline: August 31, 2010