

AROUND THE FEEDER: BLUEBIRDS

By Nancy Hillin and Joan Orr, Somervell County Master Gardeners

The bluebird has always been associated with happiness. We all think wonderful thoughts when listening to “Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly...” Bluebirds are regarded as symbols of good health, prosperity, new birth and most importantly the renewal of the spring season.

Year round, North Texans will see the Eastern bluebird and may participate in nest box programs to help increase their population. Unlike the Mountain bluebird that is mostly blue, the Eastern bluebird carries blue only on its back and orange on its throat, ear surround, chest, sides and flanks. It can be found east of the Rockies from Canada to Mexico and Honduras. The third bluebird species is the Western bluebird that is found west of the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico. The Western bluebird’s head, throat and upperparts are a deep cobalt blue; the breast is chestnut, the belly blue and varying amounts of chestnut on the back. Occasionally, the Mountain bluebird will overlap into Eastern bluebird territory where it has been seen in southern parts of Texas. The Mountain bluebird’s preferred habitat remains the American West in cooler and steeper areas.

Bluebirds make their nests in natural cavities or those abodes left behind by other species, such as woodpeckers. They will nest near your garden if you provide a properly positioned nest box and make food sources available to them. They prefer to nest in a woodland’s type atmosphere that is near clearings or meadows to make searching for food convenient. Insects and other vertebrates constitute two-thirds of the bluebird’s diet, the other third being wild berries and fruit.

The following is a list of plants, which produce seeds that will help sustain the bluebird during the months when insects are not available.

Dogwood; Hackberry; Hawthorn; Sumac; Wild Grape

Other favorites when available are: Bayberries; Blackberries; Eastern Juniper; Honeysuckle; Pokeberries; Virginia Creeper

On August 20, 2011 the Somervell County Master Gardener Association will sponsor a bluebird symposium. Some of the well-known educators in the field will present topics from nest box basics to gardening to attract bluebirds. Adults find this to be a great project and the young children in your life will enjoy it, also. You will find details in this newsletter on this most important gathering.

Source: Birds of Texas Field Guide- By Stan Tekiela