

**PROFILE: Duncan J. Mackintosh — 1926-1995, By Ray Harris**

Duncan, in his travels around southern Alberta, recognized the paucity of Mountain Bluebirds and decided to do what he could to help them recover. He realized the shortage of nesting availability, changes in farming procedures, land clearing, and introduced non-native bird species were all possibly contributing to the decline of MOBL's. In 1975 he placed 43 nest-boxes in the Lethbridge vicinity. By 1978 he observed 17 nestlings fledge. Buoyed with this small success he began traveling the rural roads of southern Alberta placing boxes in any area which he thought might be suitable MOBL habitat. At the same time he was doing "Bluebird Missionary Work," he was gradually enlisting volunteers to become monitors of the miles of trails he established.



By the time of his death he had established 722 miles of trails, 4,000-plus nestboxes, with an estimated 10,000 nestlings fledged.

Duncan began banding in 1978. He had the Master Permit in his name, in 1994 he arranged to have the Master Permit transferred to Mountain Bluebird Trails Society. At this time he had 30 sub-permit banders and 60 non-bander trail monitors.

My discovery of Bluebirds was in 1981, the year after our purchase of 32 acres "away up at the end of nowhere." Several days after my first bluebird spotting, an article appeared in the *Calgary Herald* featuring the North American Bluebird Society. This item told me all about bluebirds. Like most neophytes I didn't know an Eastern from a Mountain or that there were three species, and I believed every word as gospel.

Diligently, I built my trail and boxes following the plan as given by NABS. Using 1/4 or 3/8-inch plywood, 4x4 inch outside dimension, 1-1/2 inch entry, slightly sloping roof fastened to the front by a narrow brass screw. Not easy fastening to narrow plywood without splitting same. Where the roof met the back portion, one nailed a 1/2 inch dowel to stop rain from running into the nest (ha).

I was out on my trail when to my anger and consternation a tall man with reddish hair was putting up humongous boxes between my NABS boxes. I stopped and was rather cool and standoffish. His voice came across with a strong Scottish accent. My boxes were all wrong, too small, poor thin wood, 1-1/2 inch opening, poor design, lousy roof. I was devastated that he would humble my NABS boxes. After all NABS should be a recognized standard.

This was my introduction to Duncan. He soon enhanced my humble knowledge and like his early monitors I became a confirmed disciple. I destroyed and replaced the NABS boxes with Duncan's boxes which now have become the standard box as used by most Alberta monitors.

The close ties between MBT Alberta and MBT Montana were forged by Duncan and Art Aylesworth. They fostered co-

operation, shared knowledge and jointly operated as if there were no international border. They started two-year regional rotating conventions which were alternated in venues such as Great Falls, Plains, Lethbridge and Pincher Creek. This cooperation between the two MBT's continues as a legacy to these two bluebirders. On more than one occasion Duncan told me he and Art Aylesworth had been trying to convince NABS there was more than one species of bluebirds besides Eastern. The never ending debate they waged concerning entrance hole size needed to be 1-9/16 and the interior dimensions larger. He said they (NABS) don't listen to us, so we just go ahead and do our own thing.

One of my most treasured experiences with Duncan occurred in 1989. The federal government requested a unique display by every province to celebrate Canada Day, July 1 (comparable to your July 4) in the nation's capital. Duncan was asked to represent Alberta with a display and explanation of Mountain Bluebirds. He asked me to accompany and assist him. We were set up in front of the Parliament Buildings on Capital Hill, before an estimated crowd of 100,000 who wandered around our exhibits. It was a once in a lifetime experience for me to share with my bluebird friend.

In 1992, Duncan's dedication was recognized by The Alberta Federation Naturalists Association with their annual Lorran J. Goulden Memorial Award, one of the most valued awards of its kind in Alberta.

He was also a director of NABS and received the John and Nora Lane (NABS) Award in 1989.

Mountain Bluebird Trails was presented with the Province of Alberta "Emerald Award," which annually recognizes outstanding conservation contributions. Although it was in MBT's name, it was really through Duncan's dedication and labors we received same.

MBT planted a tree in Lethbridge's Henderson Rose Garden area as a living memorial to Duncan. The mayor, David B. Carpenter, spoke at the dedication and said "The loss of someone close is the most traumatic of human experiences, and this tree will grow as a permanent reminder of Duncan Mackintosh."

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