

BLUEBIRDS

ANNUAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting will be held Saturday, Oct. 26 at 1 p.m. in the Helen Schuler Nature Centre. Speakers, information about bluebirds, nest boxes and refreshments will all be part of the event. Anyone interested in bluebirds and learning more about them is welcome to attend.

Need nest boxes?

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call. Boxes are available, and Ken will have some at the AGM (see above.) He can be reached at 403-345-5806.



President's report

By Jim Leitch

Well, another season has come and gone with a new crop of young Mountain bluebird fledglings heading south for the winter. In spite of a late and coolish start to the season, it would appear at this stage that this was a pretty typical year for bluebird nestlings and subsequent fledglings.

The weather cooperated a little better than in recent years during that critical nesting period in May and June.

The bluebirds may have done all right this year but tree swallows, as the primary competitors for nest boxes, didn't fare as well. Steven Shumborski, our Trail Master, reported a mysterious heightened increase in dead tree swallow fledglings.

This appeared to be fairly widespread so Steven contacted Fish and Wildlife officials and was told it was due to the cool July nesting season as well as a scarcity of live insects with many young starving to death.

Another interesting issue we experienced this year was the potential presence of a tick that uses bluebirds as their host. (Continued on next page.)

President's report, continued

The tick carries diseases that can infect swine, which is obviously a big threat to local pig farmers if it is found in southern Alberta.

At this stage Steven is working with Dr. Joel Hutcheson from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and asking monitors to collect nest material samples so the CFIA can evaluate for the presence of the tick. We hope to get more information, as Joel will be our speaker at our annual general meeting Oct 26.

We currently have a limited supply of bluebird boxes and therefore are at the stage again of making requests for grant funding so we can gain the supplies to build additional boxes. Please touch bases with Ken Mackintosh at the AGM if you are in need of some boxes.

Our Trail Master, Steven, has done a wonderful job again repairing, moving and renovating existing boxes with drop-down bottoms, on a number of old abandoned trails this past season, as well as attracting new monitors. Thank you, Steven, for all your efforts.

If you know of someone who is interested in a trail as a monitor, please contact Steven because there are trails available.

A major project we tackled this year was the upgrade of our website. Our Webmaster, Jan Warren, took the lead and along with Steven and two Lethbridge College students we contracted, they worked on enhancing the website to meet our needs as monitors and as well for the interested general public. The project is nearing completion.

Once again I hosted the annual Trail Orientation Day June 1 on my trail on the west side of Lethbridge. We had six keen participants who got a chance to see an active trail in operation and what is expected if you become a monitor.

All monitors and interested public will be gathering for our annual general meeting Oct 26 at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre from 1 to 4 p.m. We are extending the meeting this year to allow for more visiting and sharing of our bluebird experiences.

Our guest speaker, as mentioned, will be Dr. Joel Hutcheson, head of the Centre for Animal Disease from the CFIA here in Lethbridge.

He will be discussing the tick situation in relation to bluebirds. Please join us on Oct 26.



From the Trail Master: stats and sights

By Steven Shumborski

First of all, thank you to all of you who look after bluebird nest boxes. A lot of hours have been volunteered by conscientious Mountain Bluebird Trails members who maintain nesting habitat for the mountain bluebirds.

We have approximately 2,593 MBT nest boxes.

We have GPS coordinates for 2,094 nest boxes, and 499 nest boxes are included in the inventory without coordinates. That means we have GPS coordinates for two-thirds of the monitored trails.

We have 95 monitors on record. This year two monitors moved away and 12 monitors have been added. The trail size has been decreased to 20 or 30 boxes to make looking after a trail more of an outing than a chore.

As for having bluebirds in your backyard, yes, it is possible with a suitable environment. A quiet yard with little traffic, a large area of short grass either pasture or mowed for feeding, and perching spots. I know of four yards that have bluebirds.

On June 12 while monitoring on Spread Eagle Road I came across a nest box with a dead female bluebird on the ground under the box. (See below.)

The male was flying around and I watched this box with interest to find out if the three young bluebirds would grow and leave the nest. The three were growing when the box was checked on June 17, and by June 30 they had left the nest.



TRAILS AVAILABLE!

Our Trail Master has several trails available and is looking for monitors. There are:

- 31 boxes south of Lundbreck
- 29 boxes north of the Oldman Reservoir
- Unknown number of boxes at Heritage Acres east of Pincher Creek
- One open request for a trail in the Waterton area if anyone is thinking of retiring in that area.

Help wanted

There is an immediate opening for a deputy Trail Master, someone who is interested in being more involved with the nest boxes and trails, and who wants to spend more time in the country interacting with monitors. Travel is involved, and as with all volunteer activity you make it as big or as small a project as you like. Contact me if you are interested.

Email is the best way to contact me:

sshumborski@gmail.com

Nest box paint: yes or no? The results are in!

By Steven Shumborski

In November 2017 I installed 21 new nest boxes on the Birds Eye Ranch east of Waterton Park. The land owners have seen bluebirds in the area but there have not been any nest boxes in the area for many years.

Ten of the boxes were new plywood, 11 of the boxes were painted grey. The boxes were alternated painted-unpainted along a road distance of 4.1 miles. The average spacing is 310 metres with a range from 260 to 640 m. In the 2018 nesting season the bluebirds nested in seven of the 11 painted nest boxes, and one of the 10 unpainted boxes. The 2019 nesting results from the Birds Eye Ranch show equal numbers of bluebirds nesting in painted and unpainted boxes.



Trail	Birds Eye Ranch
Location	RR 285
	TwpR 22
Page	1 of 1
Date	28May2019
Box ID	Observations
16-380	BB-NN
16-319	TS-NN
16-381	TS-NN
16-320	BB-F
16-382	BB-NN
16-321	TS-NN
16-383	TS-NN
16-322	TS-NN
16-384	MT
17-259	BB-F
16-385	TS-NN
17-260	BB-4E
16-386	TS-NN
17-258	TS-NN
16-387	BB-NN
17-261	BB-6E
16-390	TS-NN
17-264	BB-6E
16-389	BB-6E
17-263	MT
16-388	BB-6E

Five bluebird nests in painted boxes, five bluebird nests in unpainted boxes. By the second nesting season the painted and unpainted boxes are chosen equally by the bluebirds for nest sites. I continue to paint the new boxes with flat finish grey stain or paint to protect the plywood and extend the life of the box. (The grey fill around the number in the table indicates a painted box, Tan colour is a bare plywood box.)

Nest box renovations: Good progress continues

By **Steven Shumborski**

It has been an active year for renovation with boxes in the Police Lake, Castle River, and Beaver Creek areas being upgraded to drop-down floor style boxes with full cover roofs.

The spacing of the boxes was changed to locate boxes near treed areas with pasture with a 250 m spacing between nest boxes.

New boxes were installed in the Gladstone Valley, south of Pincher Creek, and west of

Lundbreck. So far this year 89 new boxes were installed as well as 95 renovated boxes for a total of 184 as of Sept. 26. There are another 58 boxes in garages at various stages of renovation.

If you are interested in renovating nest boxes you can use the Nest Box Renovation Suggestions document on the website. Contact me if you need the metal flashing for the top of the nest box.



Left, tree swallows are frequent inhabitants of our bluebird nest boxes, but they need a place to live too. Above, a pair of bluebird eggs inside a nest box north of Pierce, Alta. (Barb Glen photos)

Scenes from Orientation Day



Photos by Ray Huel and Barb Glen

Clockwise from top left: Jim Leitch explains extra protection on nest boxes; a bluebird enters a box; bluebird awaits departure of onlookers; bluebird young in a nest box; Ray Huel and Jim Leitch photograph a box.



Esther Smit provided these photos of young bluebirds. Thank you, Esther! We love to feature photos of mountain bluebirds, so please take and send yours along for inclusion in the next newsletter. Email them to:

barbj.glen@gmail.com



The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society has a display designed to explain the conservation mission and provide people with more information about this beautiful bird species. President Jim Leitch and trail master Steven Shumborski manned the display and talked with visitors at the Homestead Show in Fort Macleod this spring.

