

# BLUEBIRDS

A NEWSLETTER OF THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAILS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

## Amazing Teen Race includes bluebird boxes



# Bluebird nest box project builds teen teamwork

Teens from the Crowsnest Pass assembled bluebird boxes as part of the 7th annual Amazing Teen Race held Sept. 10.

Students from grades 7 to 12 formed 21 teams in the event organized by CNP 40 Assets. The Amazing Teen Race is designed to build skills in leadership, teamwork and community involvement for teenage youth.

One of the day's stations was hosted by the

BelleCrest Community Association, which challenged the teens to build bluebird nesting boxes.

The association extended its thanks to the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society for providing nest box parts for the event.

The boxes will be placed in the Crowsnest Pass for the use of the beautiful mountain bluebirds.



## President's report - Jim Leitch

# Warm fall welcome for all bluebird enthusiasts

**A**S I write this report for the 2022 season, I can't help but be surprised at the pleasant warm fall season we are experiencing. It seems like a repeat of last fall.

Like last year as well this past season, we saw some pretty extreme weather – a late arriving spring followed by an extended very hot summer. There was a concern in some parts of the province that the bluebirds were late in arriving but thankfully I did get a report that they did finally arrive. We seem to have managed to avoid the cold spring rains that can prove deadly for young nestlings.

Here in southern Alberta, our preliminary annual stats indicate that we had an average year for new bluebird fledglings, with the warm summer helping to bring numbers up.

If you haven't had a chance to complete and send your annual stats report summary to Joe Michielsen, please do so as soon as you can at [joe.michielsen@hotmail.com](mailto:joe.michielsen@hotmail.com). These reports assist us and the Alberta government with analyzing bluebird population patterns.

We wouldn't be a society without our committed volunteers on our executive board who keep the society going and thriving.

A special thank you again to Steven Shumborski, our Trail Master, who works tirelessly to track down abandoned trails and then restores and replaces boxes as required, at the same time as finding a committed Trail Monitor for each of these new trails. Steven has connected

with various interested stakeholders from schools to community groups to support them in creating their own boxes and trails.

As most of you know we have a second to none website for our society. The redevelopment and maintenance of our site is due to the efforts of Curtis Goodman, our Webmaster. If you haven't visited the site, I would encourage you to do so at [bluebirdtrails.org](http://bluebirdtrails.org).

Curtis has also worked hard to give us a much broader media exposure, as a society here in southern Alberta, which we are grateful for. Thank you Curtis. Thank you to all the other volunteers who sit on our board, to our treasurer, secretary and other directors. You are appreciated.

I hosted once again my annual spring Trail Orientation Day on June 4. We had 12 excited participants come out for this half-day event at my trail on the west side of Lethbridge. We had the opportunity to see the mountain bluebird in various stages of development, from eggs to young nestlings as well as some other bird species of interest. The weather cooperated and we had a great day.

If you have a need for boxes for your trail, please contact Ken Mackintosh at 403 345-5806.

We have again decided as a board to defer our annual AGM from this fall to the spring of 2023. We feel that this may be more of an appropriate time to have an AGM as we jumpstart a new season.



# Bluebird? Tanager?

## Galapagos sightings

Long-time MBTCS member and director Joe Michielsen visited Ecuador's Galapagos Islands earlier this year. Always with an eye on birds and other wildlife, he spotted a bird that at first glance could have been a bluebird.

Given that the species we know in Canada wouldn't likely have migrated that far south at the time, Joe sought more information and was assisted by our Trail Master Steven Shumborski.

The bird was identified as a tanager and you can see their similarities in Joe's photos.

Joe provided the following:

"I am amazed at the evolution of these subspecies of Tanagers that are commonly called finches and certainly uncertain that I have got them all identified correctly. I am still trying to identify the mainland Ecuador Tanager species I have photos of. As for the bluebird of Ecuador, Steven identified it as a Blue-Gray Tanager; one of the 66 Tanagers as native to Ecuador.

"While there I did see many other Tanagers, photographed a few of them and also photographed some birds that may or may not be a Tanager. I was able to verify the species of some, and others I just believe to be some of the 66 Tanager species.

"Bluebirds are also Passerines in the Thrush family — all part of the interesting but not exact nomenclature of wildlife.

"While in the Galapagos I saw and photographed birds identified as some of the four bird species often called Darwin Finches because Charles Darwin studied them. They are in fact not finches but instead are species of Passerines in the Tanager Family.

The size identification is mainly variations of the beak, which evolved for what the finches ate and was a big part of Darwin's theory of evolution. See photos on next page.



Top photo: Blue-Gray Tanager

Middle photo: Male Mountain Bluebird

Bottom photo: Female Mountain Bluebird



### Darwin's Finches

Clockwise, from top left: Large ground finch; common cactus finch, large cactus finch; medium ground finch; woodpecker finch; small ground finch; medium ground finch.



## New life for a trail

Last spring, dedicated bluebird enthusiast Denise Coccioloni-Amatto asked for help in renovating and updating her trail in Crowsnest Pass. The request came when the bluebirds had returned so the task was left until after the nesting season. Material was purchased using funds donated to MBTCS. The work of taking down boxes, renovating, and reinstalling them started in August. On Sept. 20, with fresh snow in the mountains, the first 33 renovated boxes were installed.



Denise Coccioloni-Amatto shows off one of the renovated nest boxes along her trail in the always scenic Crowsnest Pass. Below, another spectacular view of the area where Mountain Bluebirds make their homes.

## MBTCS outreach stretches far and wide

Jackie Hauptman reached out to Ken Mackintosh about nest box plans in early March 2022. She lives in Laramie, Wyoming and was working on a project in Guernsey State Park, about 100 miles east of Laramie, where she planned to update the trail to add and replace the current nest boxes.

The park has mountain bluebirds and tree swallows.

The pieces for a sample box were prepared by Trail Master Steven Shumborski and sent to Jackie in mid-March.

She worked with the Industrial Arts teacher and a high school class to prepare the nest box parts. In June, Jackie said the boxes had been successfully assembled by the Grade 6 students at Guernsey School.

Jackie plans to put up the nest boxes at the end of October.



## THANK YOU

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society would like to thank the following generous donors who have supplied materials and other assistance:

**4 Seasons Home Comfort**

**Curtis Goodman**

**All those who donate to the cause through  
Canada Helps**

## Stories From The Trail

One of the great things about being a Trail Monitor is the vast opportunity it provides to get outdoors, enjoy the fresh air, scenery and glimpses of other birds and other wildlife, up to and including Mountain Bluebirds. In this new and hopefully long-term feature of our newsletter, we've asked monitors to share some of their experiences and photographs from their year of trail work. Featured on this page are photos and narrative from **MBTCS Treasurer Kathy Koenig**.

It never ceases to amaze me how every time we go out on my trail, we always see something new. We have seen large varieties of birds, from the littlest warblers to Golden Eagles, and all sizes of mammals, from the wee mouse in a bluebird nest, to an elk and her calf and a bear!

I am always in awe of how each season brings its own flowers, from the crocuses and three-flowered avens in the spring to the cone flowers and purple prairie clover in the late summer and if you are lucky, you can find some wild strawberries and saskatoons.

This year was no exception when early in the season we spotted a pair of Hungarian partridge. Although not native to North America, they are still fun to see.

The highlight of my year was watching a family of tree swallows fledge. I have always wanted to see bluebirds fledge but have never been in the right place at the right time. I got lucky this year and watched as first one little tree swallow took its first "leap of faith" and then I watched while his sibling patiently waited for its' parent to return to the nest and entice him out for his first solo flight.

I can hardly wait for next year to see what my "something new" will be!



Top: Tree swallows fledge. Middle: Tree swallows observe. Bottom: Baby bluebirds. More pix next page.

## More Stories (and photos) From the Trail – Kathy Koenig



**Left-hand side photos:** A male bluebird atop a nest box; eastern kingbird; pelicans.

**Middle row:** A male bluebird with a snack; purple prairie clover; yellow warbler.

**Right-hand side photos:** A nesting mountain bluebird pair; Hungarian partridge; meadowlark; willet.



## More Stories from the Trail: the headless swallow – Jim Leitch



This photo taken last year shows the distinct green plumage of the violet green swallow. Below, Joe Michielsen captured this photo of a male bluebird bringing home dinner.



Last year, one of the pleasant surprises on my trail was having a few families of violet green swallows occupy some of my boxes for the first time ever. It was beautiful to see their flashes of turquoise green on white with a distinct purple rump. They are similar to the tree swallow.

My good news story is that they came back this year! A family returned to a nest box in the vicinity of a small outbuilding.

The next chapter in this story isn't as pleasant. As I opened the box to check on their progress, I found the mother dead on the nest. The most startling discovery as I removed her from the nest was that she was headless!

Another bird had not only pecked her to death but beheaded her as well. Nature can be harsh!

I was befuddled as to how or what could have done such a thing. My question was quickly answered when I looked back at the box and saw a house sparrow enter.

The moral of the story is that house sparrows are no friends of bluebirds or swallows and it's best to have your boxes placed as far from buildings as possible.

The second good news story is that four other violet green swallow pairs did manage to successfully raise and fledge their families in other boxes later that summer.

I am looking forward to next year to see if they return.

## Don Stiles: ‘Mr. Bluebird’ did much for birds, conservation

### **MBTCS note:**

Don Stiles of Calgary was an avid bluebird enthusiast and has helped our organization by providing advice and contact information on many occasions. Don passed away on Oct. 11 and we mourn his loss. Here is an excerpt from his obituary, which in part highlights his conservation work.



**Don James Stiles** passed away peacefully with his three sons at his side on October 11. Don was the first-born son of three to Ed and Marjorie Stiles in the homesteading frontier of eastern Alberta near Veteran. By the time he was born 1931, conditions were so intense that these years of scarcity would permanently engrain a frugal mind set in him.

All of Don’s extended family were farmers, and he might have gone down that path had it not been for the good fortune of Alberta’s oil boom. The Leduc discovery in 1947 was right at the end of high school and set him up for pursuing a degree in geophysics at U of A.

It was here that he got interested in religion, thanks

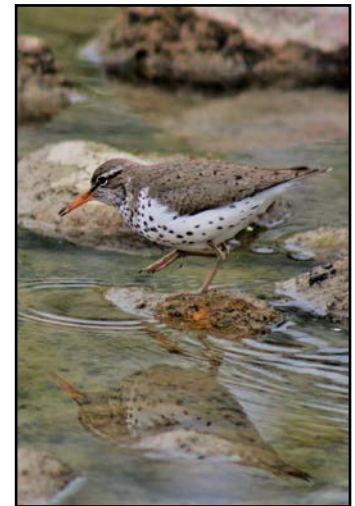
to friends that he dormed with that were studying to become ministers. Through his single years he worked for a traveling seismic company and claimed to have been in every single community in Alberta, as well as lots of Montana.

But it was the active life he lived away from the office that is really worth talking about. He loved the beauty of nature and was passionate about its preservation. He collaborated with many of like mind and spoke up for the preservation of Nose Hill, writing a book with Nature Calgary that helped sway City Hall to preserve it in 1973.

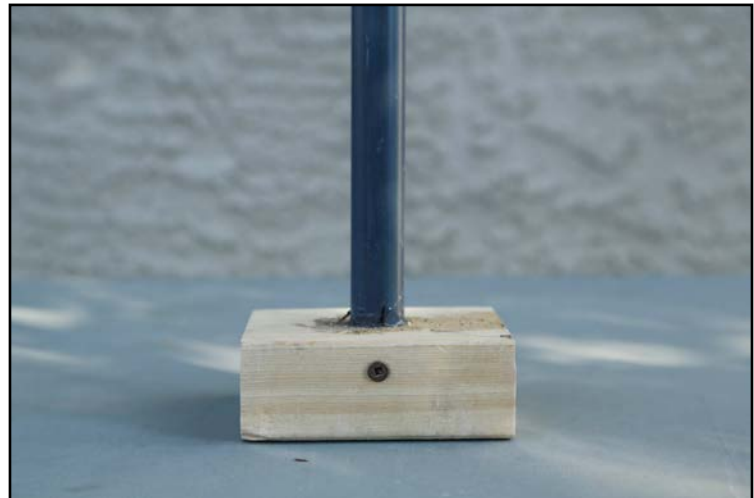
Don was also known as Mr. Bluebird. In 1977 he started a bluebird trail, and that hobby has grown into a huge

network of like-minded friends that have truly made a difference for nesting birds. His love of note taking and data analysis was only outdone by his loyalty to the project. He faithfully monitored his trails in Didsbury and Priddis for 45 years. He received a lifetime achievement award by the Ellis Bird Farm for his enormous efforts to train others in the fine art of birdhouse management. Add to that a long list of recognition milestones from across the environmental community, and you get a sense of his depth of concern for God’s good earth.

The full obituary can be found at: [mhfh.com/tribute/details/37954/Donald-Don-Stiles/obituary.html](http://mhfh.com/tribute/details/37954/Donald-Don-Stiles/obituary.html)



Bluebirds galore, plus a bald eagle, tree swallow and spotted sandpiper, by Joe Michielsen. **Please send your bluebird statistics to Joe as soon as possible. A complete summary helps us determine the status and health of the bluebird population.**



We all know that cleaning out bluebird boxes at the end of the season can be a dusty and even stinky job. Ray Huel, a trail monitor, excellent photographer and bluebird enthusiast, developed this simple tool that can assist in nest box clean out. We present it here for anyone who wants to build a similar tool for the task.

Don't forget: We're at [www.bluebirdtrails.org](http://www.bluebirdtrails.org)

### **Webmaster Update** **By Curtis Goodman**

Achieved this year:

- \* Maintained active web presence through news and events pages: 18 posts so far in 2022; four more scheduled for balance of the year.
- \* Completed minor edits and updates on Top 5 ranked pages.
- \* Increased photo content on the Member Gallery page by adding photos as they have been sent by members.
- \* Improved search engine optimization (SEO) to increase page ranking and inbound traffic opportunities. Using Google Search Console and Analytics to monitor search keywords to develop targeted content based

on information people are seeking.

- \* Integrated CanadaHelps donation button call-to-action, including an Endowment Fund Canada Helps donation option.

Website statistics so far in 2022:

- \* 5,400 unique visitors, a 28% increase year over year!
- \* 9,400 page visits, a 4% increase year over year!
- \* 44.7% of visitors are from Canada
- \* 2,000+ visitors are from Alberta
- \* Thank you to everyone that submits website content. Everyone is welcome to submit relevant content for the website - articles, photos, links, etc.- SEND TO → [projectgoodman@gmail.com](mailto:projectgoodman@gmail.com)



