

BLUEBIRDS

COME AND LEARN ABOUT BLUEBIRDS AT SPRING ORIENTATION

President Jim Leitch will provide a tour of a bluebird trail on June 1, 2019. It's an ideal chance to see a working trail, and probably see bluebirds and other birds as well. Those interested are invited to meet at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre at 9 a.m. June 1. The tour will take no more than three hours.

Need nest boxes?

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call. He can be reached at 403-345-5806 or by email at kejemack@hotmail.com

Thank you

We would like to sincerely thank Challenger Building Supplies for donating screws, stain and glue used to build nest boxes. Sincere thanks also to Home Depot for also donating screws and glue.



Raymond Huel photo

President's report

By Jim Leitch

Greetings to all, and all the best this spring and summer. We are all looking forward to another year on the bluebird trail.

As your new president, I would be remiss if I didn't take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank our outgoing president, Joe Michielsen, for his hard work and dedication in his role as president of the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society.

Now that spring has arrived, the bluebirds are back and beginning their nesting activities in the roughly 2,600 bluebird boxes we have throughout southern Alberta.

Our trail master, Steven Shumborski, has once again been very busy this past year. To date he has a record of 2,615 boxes and identified 89 trail monitors. In 2018 Steven renovated 163 boxes by repairing them as required and installing drop down bottoms for easy clean out.

Spring check

The seasonal check of boxes should be completed by now. Ensure the boxes are ready for the bluebirds — roofs on, pins in, floor raised, and check for mouse nests. Any old boxes that you are not using, or that you think are not usable, should be returned to the Trail Master for renovation. The bluebirds prefer the older boxes. Let's keep them in service as long as possible.

Bluebirds return!

The bluebirds are back.

- * March 19: First reported sighting by a CBC listener at Crowsnest Pass
- * March 22: Two pair sighted west of Beazer
- * March 21: Cypress Hills, Michelle Reservoir
- * March 22: Cypress Hills, Thelma Road,
- * March 21: Lethbridge, Popson Park
- * March 22: Gladstone Valley west of Pincher Creek
- * March 23: Oldman River Valley north of Coaldale
- * March 23: Beaver Mines, Castle River
- * March 25: Claresholm on 520 in Porcupine Hills

He has also constructed and installed 76 new boxes on new and existing trails. If you are interested in having your own trail, please contact Steven as there are existing trails available.

One of Steven's most significant accomplishments this past year, and so critical to us as a society, is the recruitment of 18 new trail monitors. Without the regular addition of new monitors to replace those who are no longer able to manage their trails for one reason or another, we would cease to exist as a society.

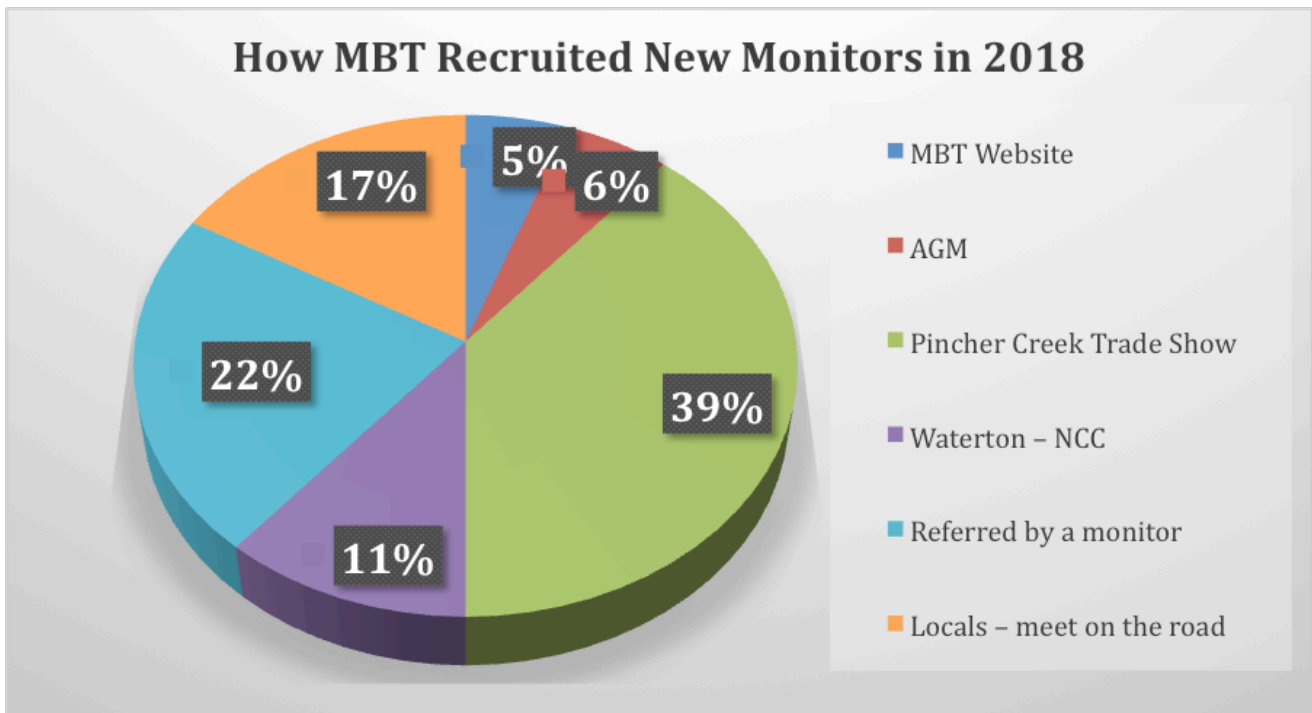
A big thank you to all our monitors, who faithfully repair and clean out their boxes to get ready for the bluebirds in the spring, monitor the activity in the boxes and record data so that we can establish trends and patterns of behaviour. That will ultimately assist in ensuring the preservation of the mountain bluebird for the enjoyment of future generations.

All monitors should have received their new monitoring permit for 2019. It is wise to have the permit with you when checking trails so you can provide it to show your legitimacy as a trail monitor working to preserve mountain bluebird populations.

If you have not received your 2019 permit, please contact Joe at joe.michielsen@hotmail.com or Steven at sshumborski@gmail.com.



Raymond Huel photo



New bluebird trail monitors recruited

**By Steven Shumborski
Trail Master**

Recruiting monitors is an ongoing requirement to maintain the trails and keep the nest boxes in usable condition for bluebird nesting.

Proximity to the mountains, recreational areas and parks provides a draw, bringing people to the foothills for recreational activities. Monitoring a bluebird trail can be one of the activities that people and families engage in when they are in bluebird habitat.

Retiring from monitoring is the inevitable consequence of aging. In some cases, family members take over care of the trail. In other situations the family members have moved to town or distant cities.

What can you do to help recruit monitors? As a monitor, you can invite others to join you on your trail.

Share the newsletter among friends and family. Spread the word. There are trails available. If you let me know which area you are interested in monitoring, I will keep you in mind when a trail comes available. It may take a year or two before a suitable trail is available.

I'm happy to report that 18 monitors joined the MBTCS ranks in 2018. Welcome to all the new nestbox monitors.

Four dedicated long term monitors retired in 2018. Ray and Ardell Harris, Shirley Redford, Gerry Kylo and Ruth Le Roux have given up their trails. Thank you for your many decades of bluebird conservation activity in building boxes, monitoring, maintaining trails and spreading the word about bluebirds. We will carry on with what you have established.

Trails available, advice on mounting nest boxes

By Steven Shumborski
Trail Master

Several trails are available and we are seeking monitors to look after them.

One of them is north of Beaver Mines: This trail has old boxes with fixed floors that have been cleaned and repaired to be functional for this season. Boxes will be renovated after the nesting season starting in mid-August.

On renovated trails, the nest boxes have been relocated to suit

the current habitat conditions. Boxes have been moved 15 metres away from trees and forested areas and removed from areas surrounded by cultivated fields and hay fields.

The preferred locations for bluebirds are pasture areas with trees nearby.

By The Numbers

We have 2,616 nest boxes and 85 monitors; 68 have GPS, 22 do not. About one-quarter of the boxes are not included in the inventory of box locations.



All nest boxes need to be mounted using at least two screws at the top of the box to prevent the box from oscillating in the Chinook winds.

Put two screws inside the box into the post. A box installed last fall did not survive the winter winds. There was a clean break at the post of the single screw holding it on.





A pair of Western bluebirds was observed west of Pincher Creek on March 27 and 28, but there have been no recent sightings.

*Chris Wieckert
photo*

More items from our Trail Master:

Coming events

The MBTCS will have a booth at the 2019 Pincher Creek Trade Show at MCC Arena, May 3-4.

It will also be at the Homestead Show in Fort Macleod May 24-25.

Seeking a deputy

If you are interested in helping with the Trail Master duties of keeping monitor information up to date, recruiting new monitors, renovating boxes when there is a transition from a retiring to a new monitor, coaching new monitors, etc., please let me know. I am interesting in sharing the duties.

I have reduced my nest box trail from 150 to 45 as I have taken on more of the organizing and supporting monitors role. Last year I renovated 163 boxes and installed 76 new boxes. There are still many trails with fixed floor boxes that need to be updated.

I can be reached at sshumborski@gmail.com

Current MBTCS executive:

President: Jim Leitch

Vice-president: Steven Shumborski

Treasurer: Ken Moore

Secretary: Barb Glen

Trail master: Steven Shumborski

Web master: Jan Warren

Directors: Joe Michielsen,

Ken Mackintosh, Gerry

Kyllo, Chris Bolton

Bluebird trails website gets upgrade: check it out!

You might not notice it immediately but by mid-May, MBTCS (Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society) will have a new redesigned website: www.bluebirdtrails.org

Our goal is to communicate better and increase our readership and number of active monitors.

Our website serves two purposes: to inform the public about bluebirds and how trails in southern Alberta help bluebird survival; and to provide support for monitors to help them prepare to monitor a trail (hint: new video coming!), and give them a place to collect information and data we need in partnership with Alberta Parks and Wildlife. That department grants us permission to check inside the boxes.

Since February we have been working with Lethbridge College, which has helped us find two students who are working as their practicum to update and expand the capabilities of our website.

There will be a new landing page (what you see first), and links to the information you need that will be easy to find. There will also be monitor links to a deeper set of knowledge about what a monitor does, and how to best help protect bluebirds and collect data about what is growing up and fledging out of the nests.

We are adding links to Facebook and Twitter so we can communicate quickly. We are creating some branding that will be useful as letterhead and on T-shirts or for future fundraising opportunities.

We hope to increase interest in the bluebird monitoring activities, and breathe some fresh air into our "dot ORG". Please visit our site at www.bluebirdtrails.org and e-mail us some good wishes or share our posts, so we can include you in notices and new information as it comes out.

Happy trails!



Blue, but not a bluebird

If you're interested in bluebirds, you might also be interested in this photo of a blue-footed booby. These birds are found in the Galapagos Islands, recently visited by newsletter compiler and MBTCS secretary Barb Glen, who took this photo. The birds' feet are blue due to their diet of fish containing carotenoids. The males are very proud of their feet, which they display prominently in their mating dance. The birds have a wingspan of nearly five feet.

