

BLUEBIRDS

Orientation session

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society president Jim Leitch will hold an orientation session June 6 for anyone interested in seeing a trail and what's involved in monitoring bluebird boxes. Social distancing will apply but so long as there are fewer than 15 people involved, it should be possible to have the orientation. It is a chance to see bluebirds and their eggs and maybe even baby bluebirds. The session runs from 9 a.m. to noon, beginning at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre in Lethbridge. Jim will take participants on a tour of a nearby trail. There is no need to pre-register but if more information is desired, contact Jim at 403-320-8970.

Need nest boxes?

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call if you want or need nest boxes. Boxes are available to replace old or worn out units or to expand trails. Ken can be reached at 403-345-5806.



MBTCS Director Joe Michielsen saw this burrowing owl in Plantation Central Park, located in the heart of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The burrowing owl is a threatened species in North America. The city has cordoned off five-square-yard areas with PVC pipe around the nesting sites. Unlike the owls found in Canada and the northern United States, some of the burrowing owls in Florida and parts of Central and South America do not migrate.

President's report

By Jim Leitch

As I write this I am sitting outside in my backyard on a beautiful spring day but my mind is distracted. I am contemplating this struggling and uncertain world we are all a part of. We certainly can acknowledge we are in unprecedented times with this coronavirus pandemic. We can also know we will come out of this and life will go on, perhaps not as we have been accustomed to, but it will go on. I am thankful to be able to pause and listen to the chirping of sparrows looking for a mate or the sweet melodious song of the house finch. These are signs that some things have not changed.

Monitor form

If you are monitoring a trail, please ask for and fill out a Trail Monitor's Agreement form. It tells the MBTCS your identity, the location of your trail and ensures that the trail is being monitored and will continue to be monitored should you want or need to give up your trail in the future. You can find the form on our website, www.bluebirdtrails.org and you can return it to Steven Shumborski by email at sshumborski@gmail.com

Hello, bluebirds

The first report of a bluebird seen this spring in southern Alberta was Feb. 28 at Lomond. A Western bluebird was observed at Beaver Mines on March 9 by Alan Plumb. A bluebird nest with eggs was seen near Lundbreck May 8.

Goodbye, bluebirds?

House cats have more impact on local wildlife than wild predators, according to this site: https://www.npr.org/2020/04/18/820953617/the-killer-at-home-house-cats-have-more-impact-on-local-wildlife-than-wild-preda?utm_source=pocket-newtab

Seeking donations

Steven Shumborski has 70 nest boxes to renovate this summer and is accepting donations of 3/4" fir plywood to complete this project. If you can help, please contact him at sshumborski@gmail.com

I am also encouraged by the fact that regardless of what is going on in the world right now, the beautiful mountain bluebird has arrived back in southern Alberta and on schedule. This is our opportunity to welcome them back and ready our nest boxes for them to once again raise a new brood.

I would like to again thank our Trail Monitors who clean out and repair their boxes faithfully each year. If you are interested in becoming a Trail Monitor please contact Steven Shumborski, our Trail Master. There are vacant trails available in southern Alberta at this time.

We do have some new boxes available in our inventory for your trails if you are in need. Please contact Ken Mackintosh.

Joe Michielsen informed the MBTCS board the process for acquiring a monitoring permit from the government has changed and is delayed. We will send out a copy of the new permit when we receive it. Please use last year's permit until this year's permit arrives.

I will attempt to once again host the Trail Orientation Day on June 6 at my trail on the west side of Lethbridge, on the condition we are able to do so safely within the health guidelines at that time.

Also due to the pandemic it is unlikely that we will be able to showcase the MBTCS at the Fort Macleod Heritage Days in late May.

Our long-time Web Master, Jan Warren, is stepping back from this role. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all of her contributions as Web Master and most recently for taking a lead in the website upgrade.

We have been fortunate to have Curtis Goodman, from the Helen Schuler Nature Centre, volunteer to be our interim Web Master. Please check out our new enhanced and upgraded website at bluebirdtrails.org. It looks great! I would like to thank Curtis for all of his work on the website.

We are also in need of some assistance for Steven Shumborski, our Trail Master, who has done a yeoman's job in tracking down, repairing, moving or replacing hundreds of nest boxes all across southern Alberta. Steven has identified 2,615 boxes and counting. If you are interested in becoming a Trail Master assistant, please contact Steven.

I wish the very best to everyone this spring in light of these challenging times. Enjoy our mountain bluebird friends while being wise and safe.

Nest box numbers, monitors on the job

By Steven Shumborski, Trail Master

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society has record of 2,637 nest boxes and at present has 101 monitors. Of those, 78 have GPS and 27 do not. Many boxes are not included in the inventory of box locations so if there is a change in monitor, there is no information to pass on to the new monitor regarding nest box locations.

The number of monitors is increasing with a steady number of nest boxes because the large trails are being split up to make trails of 25 to 35 nest boxes. The cleaning and monitoring should be enjoyable so when the number gets beyond a certain point, it becomes a chore.

There are still many trails with fixed floor boxes that need to be updated. Old boxes that you are not using or that you think are not usable should be returned to the Trail Master for renovation or salvage. The bluebirds do not object to nesting in old boxes. Let's keep them in service as long as possible.

Sixty-eight old boxes have been renovated and installed so far this year and 23 new and LCC out of storage boxes have been installed.

Welcome to all the new bluebird nest box monitors. Enjoy your time outdoors in the wide open spaces in these times of physical distancing.

Bruce Wright and Lois Everett retired as trail monitors in 2019. Thank you for your many years of bluebird conservation activity in building boxes, monitoring, maintaining trails and spreading the word about bluebirds. Thank you very much.

The recruiting started with a presentation at the Lethbridge Naturalists monthly meeting in March at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre. It has gone well this year with personal contacts and the website bringing new monitors into the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society. The work Curtis has been doing on the website is so successful that there are no trails available at this time.

If you know of someone who is interested in a trail, let me know which area and I will keep them in mind when a trail comes available.

Shane Mackintosh bought plywood and renovated 19 nest boxes and built another nine over the winter. Thank you very much, Shane. Those boxes are installed in the Willow Valley/ North Burmis area.

The seasonal check of your boxes should be completed by now. Ensure the boxes are ready to be used by the bluebirds. Roofs on, pins in, floor raised if it was left open over the winter, and check that a mouse has not built a nest in the box.

2020 Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Executive:

President: Jim Leitch

Vice-president: Steven Shumborski

Treasurer: Ken Moore

Secretary: Barb Glen

Trail Master: Steven Shumborski

Directors: Joe Michielsen, Ken Mackintosh,

Gerry Kylo, Jan Warren, Chris Bolton

We are always looking for more volunteers to serve as directors. It's not difficult! We have two or three executive meetings per year, plus the annual meeting. We talk about bluebirds and boxes and how best to foster continued attention to bluebird trails and nest box habitat. Please consider joining the executive. Call Jim at 403-320-8970 to learn more.

Website has super fabulous amazing new look

By Jan Warren
Web master (former)

[_https://bluebirdtrails.org/](https://bluebirdtrails.org/) is the link you need for the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society, all our communications and information about restoring habitat for the Mountain Bluebird.

The website is newly designed to meet the ever-evolving needs of our organization. I believe you will find this easy to navigate and is the best source of bluebird information that we could compile.

Much appreciation goes out to website designer Curtis Goodman for such a great layout and professional graphics. He has shared his ability for making information easily accessible. Thank you Curtis, for your “just in time” delivery for this 2020 season.

If you look across the top on the home page, you will find all the ornithological data, combined with professional images and graphics, to help you understand the value of what we as volunteers do. And it gives you plenty of places to get into the action and support the MBTCS.

Curtis has designed this so we can enjoy this on our mobiles, laptops and desktops. You can find upcoming events and all sorts of

management hints. There is a ton of great information in there.

Once you have read through and migrated to the bottom, you can see that we tried to make it easy for the searcher to find out more about the birds and see photos in the left hand bottom column of links. It will take you all day to see all that great, well-documented information.

Then, in the right hand column, we have put some links for the volunteers themselves to learn and record more about the ins and outs of managing a bluebird trail. Whether you want to help us build boxes or spend time hiking a trail of boxes, we have some level of involvement for you.

The places to record what you see and what issues you’ve encountered will help you help our beautiful Blues.

Check out the updated website at bluebirdtrails.org and please invite your friends and co-workers to check it out too. As soon as we can transfer the Facebook and Twitter accounts, you will be able to tweet your learnings as you go. With Curtis’ willingness to continue supporting MBTCS, I will be stepping down for real this year. I wish you a successful season of helping new mountain bluebird nestlings to thrive in Alberta. Enjoy the wide open spaces out on your trails!

The data on the following page shows we had a very successful year in 2019 with more than 1,772 bluebirds fledging in 489 nests. Unfortunately fewer than HALF of our members report so we do not know how successful MBT nest boxes are. If you look at our newly developed website bluebirdtrails.org, our new webmaster has compiled information that shows results from 2019 and also has previous years’ results and comparisons. Everyone that maintains or monitors MBT boxes needs to send in the information they have even if it isn’t complete so we can get a better idea of how well we are doing with our mandate to increase the population of bluebirds. SEE THE ATTACHED SPREADSHEET TO FIND YOUR SUMMARY along with info from the other monitors.

Mountain Bluebird Trails 2019 Reported Data

<u>Monitors</u>	Total	95
	Reported	33
	Non-reported	62
Nestboxes with reported data		1145
Nestboxes with NO reported data		1452
Total Nestboxes located		2597

Reported Monitor Information

	1 st Brood	2 nd Brood	Totals
Total nests	435	54	489
Total eggs	1843	236	2079
Total successful nests	365	39	404
Total Blue birds fledged			1772



Above, a male bluebird sits in a Mountain Bluebird Trails nest box with its young. Right, one of our trail monitors replaces the pin in a nest box while checking a trail. We wish all our monitors a great season of “blue birding”. Given the current pandemic, walking a trail is a great way to get out of the house, enjoy nature and maintain social distancing. Stay safe, stay well.





Final Inspection before the roof goes on the renovated box install



