

BLUEBIRDS

ANNUAL MEETING

Our Annual General Meeting will be held Saturday, Nov. 3, at 2 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 Joe Michielson

Migration in fall 2017 and spring 2018 was very rough on the mountain bluebird population. Fall and winter roared in last fall with an early snowstorm and continued with very few breaks. Then winter continued until late April while the bluebirds were returning and looking for both food and nesting sites.

I have not completed the monitor data spreadsheet but reports from the monitors indicate generally fewer nests and a late start. The number of second broods seems to be lower and difficult to determine because it was hard to determine if the nest was indeed a first or second brood.

Our Trail Master, Steven, has been very busy finding our Mountain Bluebird Trails (MBT) nest boxes. He has located more than 2,500 of our boxes and in many cases determined who monitors or used to monitor or maintain them.

(Continued on next page)

About parasites

From Trail Master Steven Shumborski:

The fly larvae that feed on the young bluebirds are common flies. I collected a number of the larvae and pupae from bluebird nest boxes this summer and put them in a jar.

Then I left them for a couple weeks until the adults emerged from their cocoons, and what came out?

Common flies, nothing special, just the everyday flies you see everywhere in fields and around cattle.

What can I put on the floor of the nest box under the nest to kill the larvae?

The fly larvae can be removed from drop down floor nest boxes by opening the floor of the nest box. Check the floor for fly larvae after the bluebirds have hatched, usually seven days after hatching, and again a week later if possible.

Remove the pin holding the floor, lower the floor slightly, catch any larvae that fall out of the box in a shovel, and then gently rub the bottom of the nest to dislodge any larvae that are in the nest material. Then close the floor.

Use caution when opening the floor. Some nests have very little grass under the chicks and they can fall through the nest material onto your shovel. Weekly checking is ideal as the flies develop quickly. When there are 30 to 50 larvae in the nest, the bluebirds are often killed by the fly larvae.

Steven not only located the boxes but repaired many of them including installing the metal shield and the drop bottom on those that didn't have them. I have asked him and director Ken Mackintosh to track the monitors of all our 500 'new' boxes to ensure we aren't losing track of the boxes as we locate older ones.

Our boxes that were purchased with funding through the Lethbridge and area Community Foundation are numbered using the year they were built and then dash 1-500. While on his quests to find boxes, Steven has also brought on board many new monitors and members to maintain the boxes.

Kudos, Steven, on your relentless efforts. Ken Mackintosh reports that we still have a number of boxes available to members if they want to set up more on their trails or replace aging or worn out boxes.

Steven was able to promote the MBT organization at several events in southern Alberta this year, which helped increase both our membership and people maintaining boxes. Jim Leitch led a spring orientation but few people attended. We need to find new ways to promote this.

We were very fortunate to be the recipient of a few donations this year. We wish to thank Atco Gas and a number of persons who contributed so we can continue to help Mountain Bluebirds. A few persons contributed anonymously through Canada Helps but we also wish to thank Patrick Williams, Marj Donais and family, John and Ann Brownles, and the Canyon Meadows Golf and Country Club for their donations in memory of William Slemko, who recently passed away in Calgary.

Our 2018 Annual General Meeting will be held Saturday, Nov. 3 at the Helen Schuler Nature Center from 2 to 4 p.m.. Everyone is welcome to attend. Besides discussion on stuff that happened through the past year, we have Dr. Andrew Iwaniuk from the University of Lethbridge speaking on his Ruffed Grouse research.

We are looking for members interested in holding position on our executive. Please consider taking on one of the jobs. The positions are not onerous but to operate as a non-profit organization they do need to be filled. I will be stepping down as president. Steven has generously agreed to let his name stand for another year as Trail Master but we need someone for Vice President.



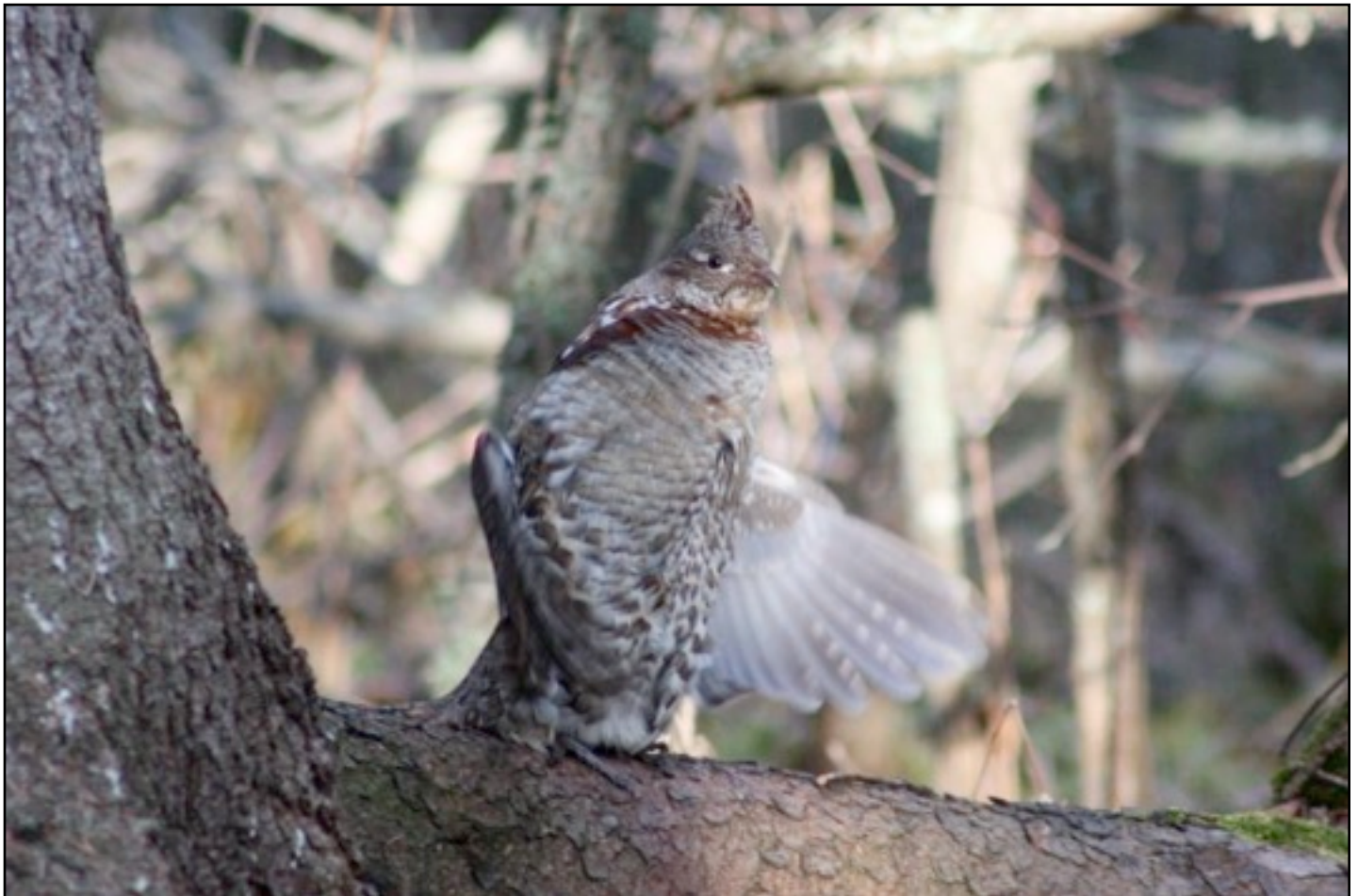
Meet Our Guest Speaker

Dr. Andrew Iwaniuk, Canada Research Chair in Comparative Neuroanatomy at the University of Lethbridge, is our guest speaker at the Nov. 3 annual general meeting to be held at 2 p.m. at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre in Lethbridge. He will speak on his research on ruffed grouse.

Over the past 10 years, he has been studying the drumming display of ruffed grouse in Alberta. He will share with us his field experiences, photos and videos, discoveries as well as the implications of his research for the long-term management of ruffed grouse.

Join us for the talk and learn more about the ruffed grouse than you ever imagined possible.

At left, Dr. Andrew Iwaniuk, holding a ruffed grouse. Below, a ruffed grouse in its natural habitat. Photos supplied by Andrew Iwaniuk.



Trail Master gradually locating, upgrading nest boxes

By Steven Shumborski

We have approximately 2,585 Mountain Bluebird Trails nest boxes. We have GPS coordinates for 1,990 of them, but there are 595 nest boxes included in the inventory without coordinates. Thus we have GPS coordinates for two-thirds of our monitored trails, and 85 active trail monitors.

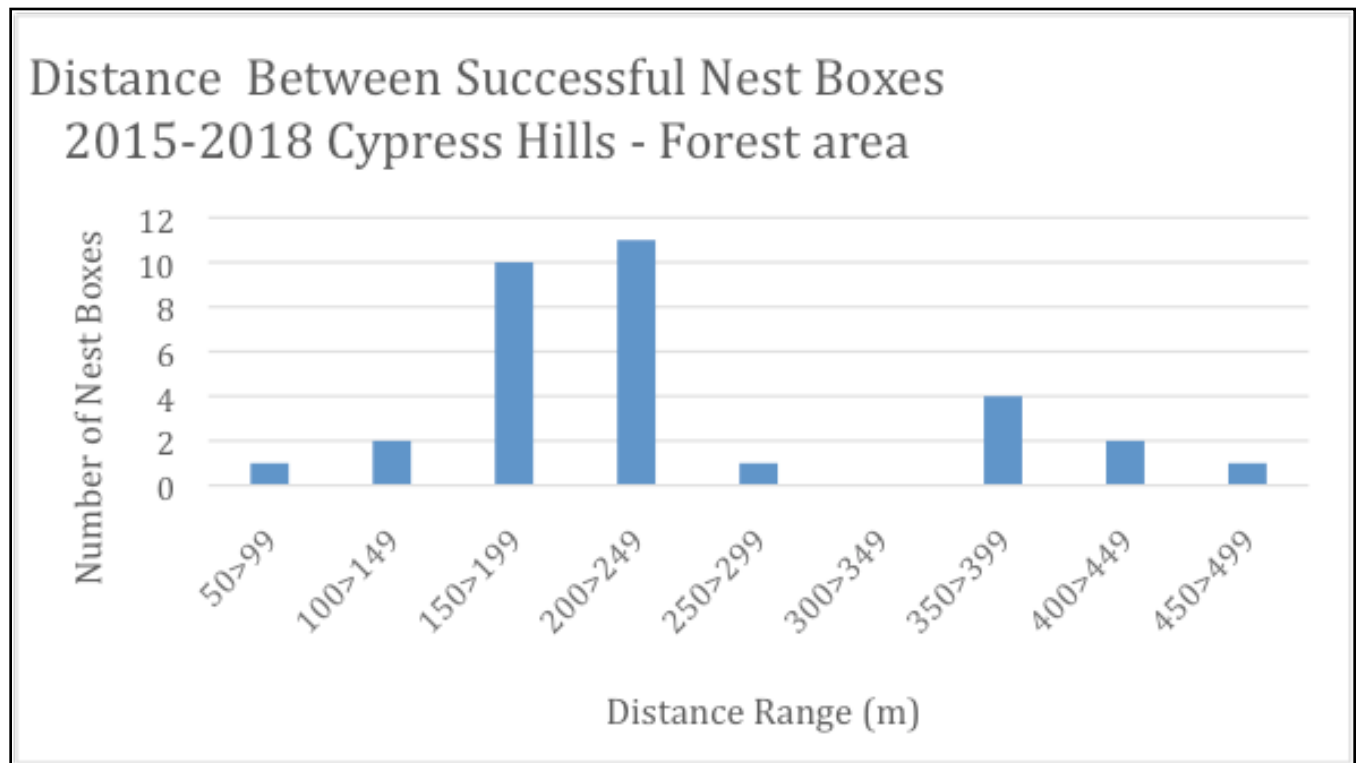
Distances:

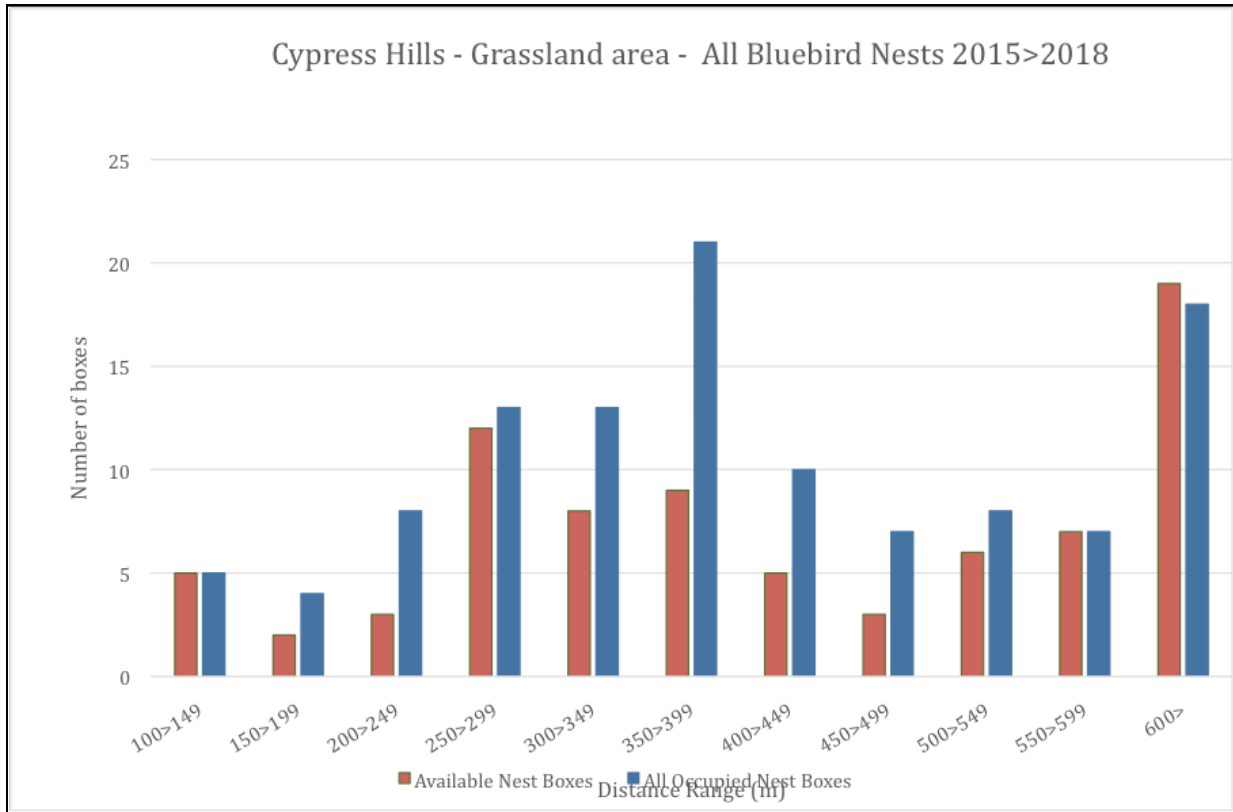
I continue to research the distance between bluebird nests to determine what is the best spacing of nest boxes for bluebirds. It seems a bit more complicated than I imagined.

There are two trails in the Cypress Hills, one in the forested area and the other on the western end of the hills in the grassland area.

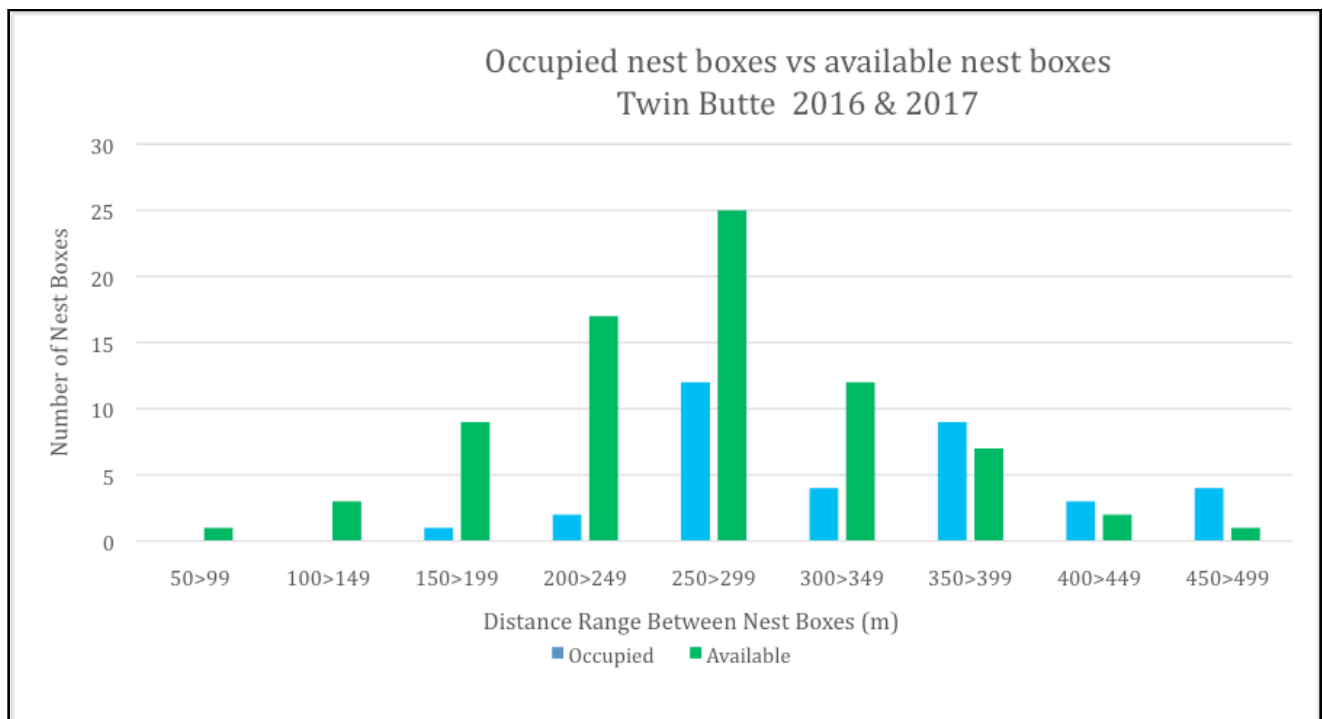
The distance between nests in the forested area is largely 150 to 250 metres. The distance between nests in the grassland area is predominantly 250 to 400 m.

A monitor in the foothills has observed that the presence of fir trees increases the nesting of the mountain bluebirds in his area northwest of Pincher Creek. Perhaps this is the same effect I am seeing in the Cypress Hills. Anyone else with observations on the nesting affected by tree types?





Around Twin Butte the most common distance between bluebird nests is 250 to 300 m.





What nest box colours do bluebirds prefer?

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 and unpainted along a road distance of 4.1 miles.

The average spacing is 310 metres with a range from 260 to 640 m. Bluebirds nested in seven of the 11 painted nest boxes, and one of the 10 unpainted boxes. The test continues to see how many years it takes before unpainted and painted boxes are selected equally by the bluebirds.

Trails are available. Can you help?

As of Oct. 8, 2018, there are 21 boxes east of Waterton Lakes National Park, 30 boxes on Beaver Creek Road west of Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump and 16 boxes southwest of Fort Macleod at the TransAlta wind farm. Are you interested in becoming a trail monitor for one of these areas? If so, please contact Steven Shumborski at sshumborski@gmail.com.

Trail	Birds Eye Ranch	
Location	RR 285	
	TwpR 22	
Page	1 of 1	
Date	20May2018	3June2018
Box ID	Observations	Observations
16-380	TS-NN	TS-2E
16-319	MT	TS-NN
16-381	BB-F	BB-F
16-320	MT	TS-NN
16-382	MT	TS-NN
16-321	TS-NN	TS-NN
16-383	TS-NN	TS-5E
16-322	MT	TS-NN
16-384	BB-4E	BB-F
17-259	TS-NN	TS-NN
16-385	BB-3E	BB-F
17-260	MT	TS-NN
16-386	TS-NN	TS-NN
17-258	MT	TS-2E
16-387	BB-4E	BB-F
17-261	BB-NN	BB-5E-F
16-390	BB-6E	BB-4Y
17-264	MT	TS-4E
16-389	BB-F	BB-7E
17-263	MT	TS-NN
16-388	BB-F	BB-Y+1E



THANK YOU!

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society extends thanks to Esther Smit and Liz Saunders for supplying photos for this newsletter.

We would also like to thank Ellis Bird Farm, Jan Frith, Wolverine Painting and Challenger Building Supplies for their assistance with MBTCS and its work to support and protect mountain bluebirds.





Orientation day

Jim Leitch, MBTCS board member and trail monitor, (above), organized and held the annual orientation day June 2.

He and his group visited an active trail on the west side of Lethbridge. It was a beautiful warm sunny day as they spent the morning checking out boxes with bluebird eggs as well as bluebird young.

Everyone got to take pictures and experience what is involved in managing a bluebird trail. The group got to see different kinds of bluebird boxes, some older with wire and metal guards to protect against predators and some newer boxes with drop down bottoms.

As a bonus they also got to see some other species of birds that were passing through on their spring migration north. All in all it was a great day on the trail.

