

Mountain Bluebird Trail

Duncan Mackintosh

At a meeting of the Lethbridge Naturalist Society which I attended in 1973, a student from Manitoba who was attending our community college brought a bluebird nestbox. The Society gave me \$14.35 to construct 40 nestboxes of the Manitoba design. That first year the boxes were monitored by members under the name of the Lethbridge Naturalist Society Bluebird Project for which I was to be the coordinator. Initial results were poor with only two boxes occupied in 1974.

Boxes were supplied for three years by Cam Finley of Edmonton who had founded Alberta's trail in 1971. When that source ended the Society abandoned the project informing me that I could keep it up or forget about it. No record was kept of the nesting boxes and soon only one-third of the 150 boxes could be accounted for.

During the 1979 nesting season I monitored four boxes. Three of them fledged 17 Mountain Bluebirds and the fourth produced a family of Tree Swallows.

That same year I formed "Mountain Bluebird Trail" (MBT) with four keenly interested individuals. Out of our own pockets we bought material to construct 385 nesting boxes permanently placing each one on the trail. In 1980 a major expansion of the MBT (Leth) was undertaken. As our nestbox trail expanded throughout southern Alberta, it was noticed by the Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Energy and Natural Resources, and we were promptly commended for our initiative and dedication to this worthwhile conservation program by Duane S. Radford, Regional Director, Southern Region.

Mr. Radford took immediate steps to have our trail partly financed with a grant from the "Bucks for Wildlife" fund which is administered by the Fish

and Wildlife Division. A generous much-welcomed grant was received in both 1981 and 1982. We are also indebted to Lorne Fitch, Regional Habitat Biologist of Fish and Wildlife Division for our trail-marked maps.

Because nestboxes cost money we are always looking for donations of scrap lumber, group aid, or individual contributions. Boy Scout troops, mainly in Lethbridge, but several in other parts of southern Alberta, assemble hundreds of boxes for us each year. In Montana where the public is much more bluebird conservation-minded than in Alberta, sawmills, lumber yards and contractors often donate material ready for assembly. The majority of that material is cedar. Our most reliable source of ready-made nestboxes is Harold Hughes, of Coaldale, who has personally purchased materials and constructed 200 boxes for us to date.

By 1980 we had 560 nesting boxes available within a 60 mile radius of Lethbridge. Results were encouraging: 247 Mountain Bluebirds fledged from 50 boxes. That was also the first year I banded nestlings: 171 were banded plus one After Hatching Year (AHY) female. In 1982 we fledged 387 of which 307 were banded plus 26 adult females and 1 male. That year we traveled 3,000 miles covering the 500 mile trail.

We continued to expand the Lethbridge portion of the trail until, by 1983, 1,080 boxes were available for the nesting season. Monitors increased in four years from 6 in 1980 to 28 in 1983. Each is responsible for from 3 to 50 boxes. Maintenance, the collection of data for scientific purposes, and banding are important so all boxes are visited at least four times each year.

Through my membership in NABS I met Art Aylesworth in July 1980, in Ronan, Montana. Art had had 10 years experience with bluebird conservation; his main interest was also the Mountain Bluebird. On 11 September 1980, I was invited to Great Falls (MT) to help interested bluebirders organize their bluebird trail. I was asked if Montana could use my name "Mountain Bluebird Trail." I agreed since the state was within the breeding and migration range of the Mountain Bluebird. That year I duplicated my slide presentation twice for Montana sending one copy to Ronan and the other to Great Falls. These programs have been used extensively by interested organizations in promoting bluebird conservation.

In Chinook Country I have improved my slide presentation each year. Initially I had worked mainly with Boy Scout groups; by 1980 and 1981 interest spread to various service clubs and fish and game organizations. During 1981-82 ten presentations were made in southern Alberta to 455 people. During the winter of 1982-83 I was invited to speak on 15 occasions to a total of 560 people about the MBT.

During 1980 we decided to have a general meeting each year in February. For two years the attendance was good in Lethbridge, but few results materialized. When I suggested to Art Aylesworth that we have our 1983 meeting in Montana, he was delighted. The monitors in Great Falls organized the first Mountain Bluebird Trail annual meeting in Montana. Guest speakers were five dedicated bluebirders from southern Alberta, Montana and Idaho, who provided an excellent day-long program. During the afternoon business meeting I was officially elected president of the organization.

The 1983 nesting season in southern Alberta began with 28 monitors checking 1,080 nestboxes. In Montana where we had only earlier that year introduced our monitoring system we had an area manager plus 17 dedicated people learning to

monitor 6,000 nestboxes. In north-eastern Idaho, an area which recently joined the MBT, we have two area managers with a total of 125 boxes. Clarence Hagerman was the first Idaho bluebirder to contact us. Ken Hood, who recently moved to the Spokane area, is showing keen interest.

In Montana, in addition to Art Aylesworth of Ronan, Deni Hershberger in the western portion of the state is increasing the population of Western Bluebirds dramatically.

Our mailing list totals well over 200 people interested in bluebird conservation who receive our newsletter report in the fall. Our local newspaper *The Lethbridge Herald*, has done an outstanding job of reporting the success of the trail. The magazine *Montana Outdoors* made an excellent contribution to our effort with their article in the March-April 1983 issue.

Those volunteers who monitor boxes are as follows: Great Falls area, Tom Matsko, Vincent Galli, Verne Sebens; Billings, Harold Koontz; Missoula, Harold Knapp; Glasgow, Barbara Hansen; Hamilton, Elizabeth Kehmeier; Lewiston, Jack Woodworth; Polson, Dick Hinman; Helena, John Delano; West Glacier, Ev Lundgren; Bozeman, Dennis Flath. Monitors in southern Alberta often work in pairs: Sheila Petherbridge and Joyce Ives; Randy Lee, Leonard Isaacson; Harvey Johnstone; Barbara Kingscote; Hazel Hudson and Grace Norgard; Bill Skelton; Don Kirk; Harry Gresel; Hank Coulter; Allan McCaskill and Bob Hamilton; Catharine Russell; Bill McKay; Garry Walch; Ernie Friesen; Bill Stanton; Clayton Truman; L. and B. Sommerfeldt; Willie Wiebe; Dave Gensorek; Ralph Erdman and Doug Wyatt; Frank and Dorothy Deane; Armin Dyck; John MacLeod and George Harris; Pat Watson; John Green; Gordon and Hazel Ross; Gordon Chalmers. Three key people in our organization are our secretaries: Hazel Ross, Gladys Galli, and Carol Haycock.

We are much indebted to numerous land owners for their cooperation in allowing us access to

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weed patch for wildlife is easily maintained with an annual mowing to discourage the growth of woody plants. Large farms may employ "travel lanes" composed of weedy plants and brush to provide food and cover for wildlife. Forested acreage will generally support a greater number of wildlife species when combined with scattered clearings dominated by weedy vegetation.

It is interesting to note that Webster defines a weed as "a plant with no value." Considering the contributions made by so many of these plants, there must be very few "weeds" indeed. ■

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and through their property. This permits us in some areas to have a continuous trail for many miles. With the cooperation and enthusiastic help of many people, our growing organization is fledging more and more Mountain and Western Bluebirds. ■

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Editor's Note: At the Western Regional Meeting of the North American Bluebird Society on 18 June 1983, Duncan Mackintosh was given a John and Norah Lane Award while Mountain Bluebird Trail received the Lawrence Zeleny Award which is given to a group which has made significant contributions to bluebird conservation.

Jon Werner Becomes Eagle Scout with Bluebird Project

Jon Werner, 15, of Scout Troop 160 of Greensboro, NC, became an Eagle Scout in September, 1983. For Jon's service project he built, installed, and monitored 10 cedar bluebird nesting boxes. He also built a traveling bluebird information display which he gave to the T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society in Greensboro. The traveling display can be used at parks, malls, libraries, schools, public affairs, etc. The display covers the following topics: description of a male and female bluebird, nesting sites, food, predators, bluebird box specifications, placement of bluebird nesting boxes, monitoring of bluebird nesting boxes, bluebird nesting, and care of the young.

Jon is a member of the North American Bluebird Society. His adviser for the project was NABS member Linda Phillips of the T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society. ■



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