

BLUEBIRDS

OUR ANNUAL MEETING

Like everything else affected by the pandemic, our annual general meeting, usually held in October, will be postponed to a yet-to-be-determined date in March. Watch our website for the exact time, date and place. We hope to be able to meet in person then for the AGM, pandemic restrictions permitting.

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.

Nest box repairs?

Now is a good time to renovate nest boxes to install drop-down floors and full roofs, says our Trail Master, Steven Shumborski. It's also a good time to relocate boxes if necessary. Those interested can contact Steven at sshumborski@gmail.com



Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society president Jim Leitch removes the lid from a nest box during his annual orientation event held in June.

President's report

By Jim Leitch

Fall is upon us but who would know, with temperatures in the mid-20s? If this is fall, I will take it.

This has been an extraordinary year for unpredictable weather, with unprecedented heat this past summer. These extreme weather patterns have also taken a toll on the mountain bluebird population. Numbers of returning bluebirds this past spring to nest were down from previous years and in some areas the birds were late in arriving.

This appears to be the case generally across the board in other parts of the province. The consensus as to why seems to be that the harsh winter in the lower



Trails by numbers

Trail Master Steven Shumborski reports that our society now has 2,730 nest boxes, which are cared for by 110 monitors. There are no trails available at present.

If any of your boxes have missing roofs or unsteady mounts, Steven is also the person to contact.

Also, if you are retiring, moving or no longer want your trail, please contact Steven so it can be reassigned to another monitor. He's at sshumborski@gmail.com.

states, where the bluebirds winter, was the biggest factor but perhaps not the only one.

We know that bluebird numbers were down from the annual reports you send in as monitors at the end of each nesting season. We rely on these reports to assess what is happening with the bluebird populations. If you haven't had a chance to send your annual report to Joe Michielsen, please take a few minutes to do that.

As was the case in the two previous newsletters, we are still in the grasp of this pandemic and its impacts. We are thankful as a society that our activities for the most part are outside. The opportunity to get out and monitor boxes this past season I am sure was a welcome relief to ongoing restrictions in other areas.

I hosted my annual Trail Orientation Day on June 5 for an eager group of seven individuals from around southern Alberta. We had a lovely half day on the trail observing the nesting activities of the mountain bluebird at various stages of development from eggs to young fledglings.

We also had a chance to see other bird species as well but the unexpected treat this year was the discovery of the violet green swallow in a few boxes. This was a rare occurrence indeed and the first time I personally have ever had this particular species of swallow nest in what is normally occupied by, if not a bluebird, then a common tree swallow or the occasional house wren.

Thank you to my fellow executive team members who were able to attend and for adding their informative comments and experiences.

Thanks again to our hardworking Trail Master, Steven Shumborski, for all his efforts with the discovery and restoration of old trails along with his constant work in renovating and making adjustments to existing boxes on the many trails in southern Alberta.

Steven has also taken a lead with community schools that want to collaborate with us to make boxes as school projects. In addition, Steven has managed to actively recruit new monitors when trails are abandoned or monitors have to give up their trails for various reasons.

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President's report, continued

Once again, we want to recognize all the hard work that has gone into the upkeep and maintenance of our website (bluebirdtrails.org). Thank you, Curtis, for all you do. We would not have the exposure that we do, nor be able to support those in the bluebird community that contact us for assistance with their trails, without this wonderful, upgraded website.

It has come to our attention that our Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society will be 50 years old in 2024, as best as we can determine. Therefore, we have undertaken an initiative to gather as much historical information as we can so we can provide a history on our website. If you know of past members who could contribute historical information, facts or anecdotal stories, please contact Curtis Goodman, our Web Master, by accessing the "Contact Us" tab on our website.

As was the case last fall, we have decided as an executive to defer the annual general meeting from this fall to March 2022. We hope to meet in person at that time.

Thank you to all our faithful monitors who give of their time and resources to make a huge difference in supporting the beautiful mountain bluebird population here in southern Alberta and beyond.



Finding a rare violet green swallow in a nest box on Jim Leitch's trail was an unexpected treat for those on the trail orientation day this June.

— Joe Michielsen photos

30 years of blue birding — Carol Porter trail



Submitted by Steven Shumborski

In the last 30 years of monitoring of the Carol Porter Trail, there have been three seasons with low numbers of bluebirds fledged: 2002, 2009, and 2021. The weather appears to be the main factor in the number.

In 2002 there was a snowstorm on May 22-23 with 23 centimetres of snow and temperatures between -8 and +7 C.

In 2009 there was a snowstorm on June 5 to 7 with temperatures between 0 and 12 C. On June 5 of that year, nine cm of snow fell, with a gusty northeast wind, and on June 6 there was another five cm of snow and a gusty northeast wind. June 7 brought another two cm of snow.

In 2002 and 2009 the snowstorm decimated the first brood with 240 sterile eggs in 2002 and 125 abandoned eggs in 2009. In 2021 46 per cent of the first brood eggs were sterile.

In 2002 and 2009 the number fledged in the second brood exceeded the first. That was not the case in 2021 where the second brood had fewer fledglings than the first brood.

This past nesting season had a snowstorm on May 20 to 23 with temperatures between -2 and +9, with seven cm of snow. A little over a month later, the maximum daytime temperature was between 37 and 40 C from June 29 to July 2. (Nesting info from Milton Spitzer; weather info from Environment Canada.)

2021 Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Executive:

President: Jim Leitch

Vice-president: Vacant

Treasurer: Ken Moore

Secretary: Barb Glen

Trail Master: Steven Shumborski

Web Master: Curtis Goodman

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.

The question: What sites do bluebirds prefer?

By Steven Shumborski

I am thrilled to be working with Zack Moore on an offshoot of his Masters in Natural Resource Management.

His thesis is on Interactions between Landscape Structure, Vegetation Communities, and Range Health on Grassland Songbird Communities in the Complex Topography of the Foothills Fescue-Parkland Transition in Southern Alberta, Canada.

Zack has a bluebird nestbox trail on Shoderee Road north of Waterton and has offered to investigate bluebird nest site preference using the techniques he has developed to study songbirds.

Bluebird nesting site selection is a topic that is dear to my heart and has been, ever since I was assigned my first trail on Drywood Creek.

I have been doing my own experiments to try and discern the needs of the bluebirds.

Zack’s data analysis offers a much more informed perspective by combining nestbox location and breeding success with landscape characteristics.

I have started assembling my own monitoring data to transfer to Zack by the end of October.

Data in a table is preferred, but data on a paper copy is OK. Scan the paper copy and send it to me to enter into an electronic file.

If you would like to have your monitoring data included in the study, please contact me. The more data points included in the study, the more robust the conclusions. The number of years and the locations on the landscape will speak to us about the bluebirds nesting site preferences.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your participation in this exciting project.

This is a sample of what my personal monitoring sheets look like:

Trail	Waterton Gas Plant North			BB first nest	BB Second	BB Dead	Adult
Location	TWP RD 4-5, 5-0,			TS first nest			
	RR 30-3, 1-0			W first nest			
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Date	16May2021	31May2021	13June2021	25June2021	8July2021	29July2021	5Sept2021
Box ID	Observations	Observations	Observations	Observations	Observations	Observations	Observations
21-21	TS	TS	TS-7E	TS-7E	TS-7Y	TS-7FL C	see repairs
21-22	BB-NN	BB-6E	BB-5Y-1SE	BB-5Y-1SE	BB-5FL C	MT	
21-23	MT	MT	MT	BB-4E	BB-4Y nfl	BB-4FL C	
21-24	MT	TS-NN	TS-5E	TS-5Y?	TS-5Y	TS-5FL C	
21-25	BB-1E	BB-6E	BB-F-Y	BB-6Y-rtf nfl	BB-6FL C	MT	
21-26	TS	TS-NN	TS-6E	TS-6E	TS-6Y	TS-6FL C	
21-27	MT	TS-NN	TS-F-4+E	TS-F	TS-2Y	TS-2FL C	



Bluebird trail monitoring often provides the chance to see beautiful scenery and vistas. Joe Michielsen took this photo during the June orientation in the Oldman river valley.

Bluebird website gains traffic, posts and data

Our Web Master, Curtis Goodman, has been updating our website and tracking its traffic. The site helps the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society share its mission, statistics, research, observations, sightings and photos. Member suggestions are welcome and encouraged to help us improve the site.

They can be sent to: projectgoodman@gmail.com.

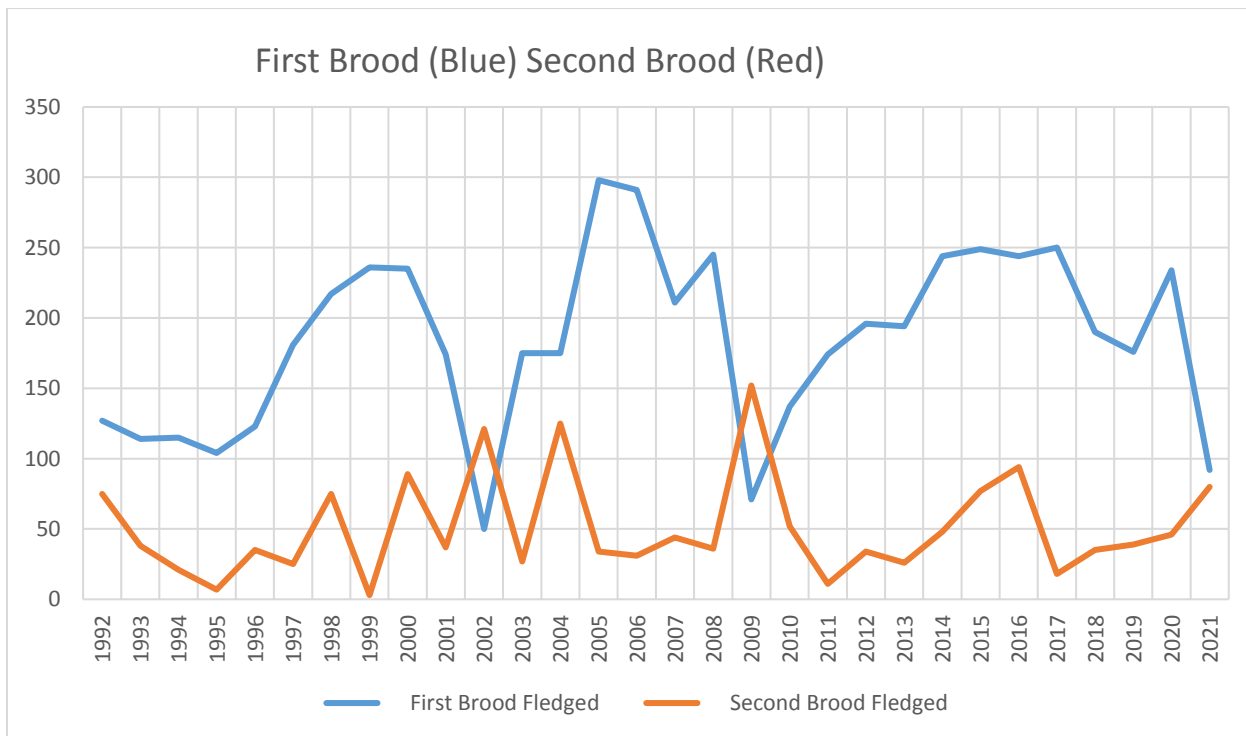
Analysis shows most people visit our site using desktop computers, as opposed to mobiles or tablets. We had 5,004 visits this year from January through September. Some 2,242 site visitors were from Alberta, with 848 from Calgary, 337 from Lethbridge and 273 from Edmonton.

30 years of Bluebird Monitoring of the Carol Porter Mountain Bluebird Trail at Cypress Hills

In the last 30 years of monitoring of the Carol Porter Trail there have been three seasons with low numbers of bluebirds fledged: 2002, 2009, and 2021. The weather appears to be the main factor in the number of bluebirds fledged.

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Bluebird nesting information from: Milton Spitzer

Weather Information from: Environment Canada, Historical Data

https://climate.weather.gc.ca/climate_data/daily_data_e.html?StationID=30347&timeframe=2&StartYear=1840&EndYear=2021&Day=15&Year=2021&Month=6#