

BLUEBIRDS

A newsletter of the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society



Tales and photos from the trail

By Kathy Koenig

My bluebird season is over, my boxes have been cleaned and all my data has been sent in to Joe (hint, hint for all of those of you that haven't yet!) and now it's time to reminisce.

Monitoring a bluebird trail over the course of a season allows you to not only enjoy the beauty of watching a family of bluebirds find a home, lay their eggs and raise their babies until they finally leave the nest, but also to enjoy the beauty of nature that surrounds us.

This photo and those on the next page are some of the “surprises” that I was fortunate enough to see while out on my trail.





Photos clockwise from top left: A beautiful male mountain bluebird; a female bluebird brings dinner to a nest box; a sharp-tailed grouse; a male bluebird has a tasty insect; a red-tailed hawk soars above; a killdeer trots away. **Front:** a bluebird pair; a tree swallow peeks out.

President's report

Trail monitors working to protect bluebirds

By Jim Leitch

Here we are at the end of another eventful and fruitful mountain bluebird season.

The wind stayed down a bit this fall, which allowed the leaves to stay longer on the trees so we could enjoy them.

The bluebirds arrived on time around April and went to work right away, pairing off, finding a mate and beginning the process of nest building in the boxes we provide.

The weather this past season was similar to the last few years in that it was very warm and very dry. We managed to avoid those cold and wet early spring rains again, which can take such a toll on the young fledglings. In the end we tend to get better outcomes with warmer dry weather.

A big thank you to all our trail monitors who sent your statistics for 2023. This was an average year for bluebird fledglings. Some areas in southern Alberta were above normal and other areas were down a bit compared to previous years.

If you haven't reported on your trail yet, we would love to hear from you. Please take a moment to send your report to joe.michielsen@hotmail.com with the form provided in a recent email sent to you from Steven Shumborski in September. These statistics assist us and others with monitoring the population patterns of the mountain bluebird here in southern Alberta.

Once again, thank you to all our volunteer board members who have given countless hours to make sure the beautiful mountain bluebird thrives for years to come. A special shout out to our Trail Master, Steven Shumborski, who as usual has gone above and beyond, travelling the back roads of

southern Alberta to restore and re-establish abandoned trails and then finding trail monitors to manage them.

Thank you also to all our committed trail monitors who work on their trails to ensure the mountain bluebird and other protected passerine songbirds, like wrens and swallows, are with us for future generations to enjoy.

I once again hosted our annual Bluebird Trail Orientation Day on June 3. There were 12 eager participants who joined in for the half-day event at my trail on a private farm in west Lethbridge.

We were blessed to see mountain bluebirds at various stages of development, from eggs to fledglings, as well as other migratory bird species desiring to start a family in the area. Four of our guests ventured all the way from the Grande Prairie area of the province, which added to the fun and excitement for everyone. It was a great day all around.

Due to the above normal demand this year, I hosted two other orientations on June 8 and 10, which turned out to be another wonderful two days on the trail, bluebird sightseeing and taking pictures.

If you haven't checked out our website yet, please do so at bluebirdtrails.org. It's everything bluebirds and more.

A small group of our board members convened this past spring to update our society bylaws. This exercise has now been completed.

The updated bylaws will be presented at the annual general meeting for consideration and approval.

Our next event will be the annual AGM for 2023, which we are planning for spring 2024 – just in time for a new bluebird season.

Trail Master notes

By Steven Shumborski

The bluebirds continue to surprise me. On a number of trails I am renovating, I was ready to take down nest boxes because they were empty, or only used by tree swallows.

This year some of those boxes had bluebirds nesting, so I am reminded to leave the boxes for the bluebirds to choose.

Renovation?

I am accepting requests for nest box renovation to be done any time now and up to the middle of March 2024. I no longer do renovations after the bluebirds have returned in the spring. It disturbs their territorial selection and subsequent nesting.

Still monitoring?

If you are unable to continue monitoring, let me know and I will check the boxes and renovate if I find fixed floors, or old style roofs, then return the boxes to service with full roof and drop down floor.

My new phone number is 825-594-5222, email sshumborski@gmail.com.



Trail available

The Paradise Canyon Golf Course nest boxes are available for monitoring. Members of Paradise Canyon have the first opportunity to monitor this trail. If no member expresses an interest by mid-March 2024, I will offer it to anyone in MBT who is interested.

Anyone else?

Let me know if you know of landowners who want to install boxes on their property. Expanding the placement of nest boxes onto private property is a way to provide more nesting sites for the Mountain Bluebirds.



Bluebirds by the (limited) numbers

Data reported for 2023 - up to Oct. 15, 2023

of eggs reported - first brood 1843
 # of fledged reported - first brood 1548
 # of sterile eggs - first brood 128
 # of dead nestlings - first brood 119
 # of abandoned nestlings - first brood 70
 # of eggs reported - second brood 393
 # of fledged reported - second brood 292
 # of sterile eggs - second brood 46
 # of dead nestlings - second brood 32
 # of abandoned nestlings - second brood 60
 total # of bb eggs reported 1941
 total # of fledged bb's reported 1840
 # of sterile bb eggs 174
 # of dead bb nestlings 151
 **Some numbers don't add up, like total fledged with eggs with sterile, abandoned or dead nestlings, but those are the numbers reported.

of MBT members that maintain but don't monitor 5
 # of boxes not reported 1250+
 # of boxes reported 1469
 total boxes OVER 2700
 # of members that reported 52
 # of members that did not report - about 50%

It is difficult to provide a true picture of how successful MBT is in providing nesting habitat and if the bluebird population is increasing due to our efforts when 50% or less of the members with trails report. It is not too late to report your results from 2023 to joe.michielsen@hotmail.com

[\(Photos below by Wendy Kemper\)](#)



2023 Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Executive:
 President: Jim Leitch
 Vice-president: Curtis Goodman
 Treasurer: Kathy Koenig
 Secretary: Barb Glen
 Trail Master: Steven Shumborski
 Web Master: Curtis Goodman
 Directors: Joe Michielsen, Ken Mackintosh, Connie Chapman, Rick Williams, Steven Shumborski, Sherri Bohnert

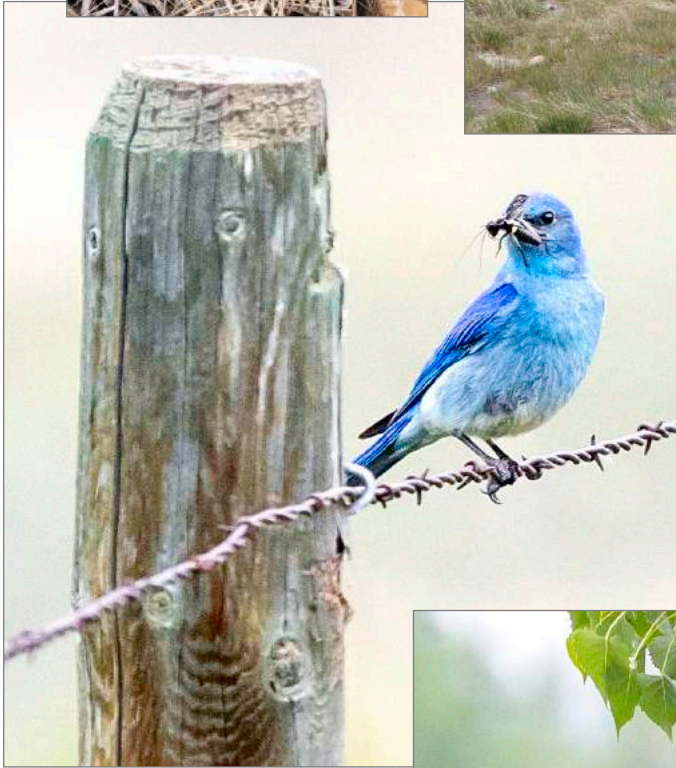
Directors at large: Bob Cooper, Denise Coccioni-Amatto, Milton Spitzer, Trudy Woolford.
 We are always looking for more volunteers to serve as directors. It's not difficult. We have two or three executive meetings per year, plus the annual meeting.
 We talk about how best to foster continued attention to bluebirds and nest box habitat. Please consider joining the executive. Call Jim at 403-320-8970 to learn more.

Getting oriented: A successful spring event



Among attendees at Jim Leitch's June orientation event was Wendy Kempert of Grande Prairie, who sent the photos here and on the following page. Wrote Wendy: "A group of 4 of us made the trek from Grande Prairie to Lethbridge for the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Tour. What a wonderful and informative experience. I didn't want it to end!"



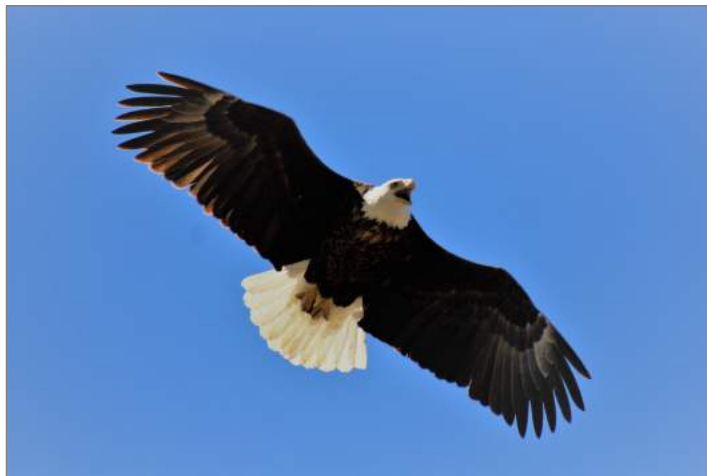
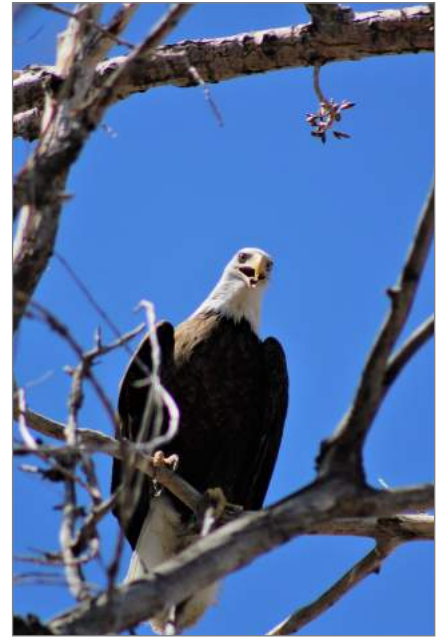




Connie Chaplin sent the photos on this page taken on her bluebird trail along highways 520 and 22. She and fellow trail monitor Kim Godwin enjoy the scenery and sights that trail monitoring entails.



Rick Williams' photo at left captures the brilliant blue of our favourite bird. Joe Michielsen sent the other photos on this page: eagles, Great Horned owlets, song sparrow, and spring azure butterfly.



And now for something completely different...

One of the beauties of trail monitoring is the other wildlife we are able to see on our journeys. Joe Michielsen spent time in spring watching these playful fox pups near Tempest and pelicans on the Oldman River near his trail.



Making history

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society will be 50 years old in 2024 and we want to compile a history of its activities over the years. If you have memories or other information about the society's past, please send it via our website. Any and all submissions are welcome.



Yes, this page is blank. I can't seem to get rid of it!