

# BLUEBIRDS

## Orientation session May 27

MBTCS director Jim Leitch will, once again, provide an orientation session for novice or experienced bluebird trail monitors and for anyone interested in seeing bluebirds and nest boxes. This year's event is on May 27 from 9 a.m. to noon. Meet at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre at 9 a.m. and dress for the weather. Jim will take participants on a tour of his trail and show what's involved in trail monitoring.

## Need nest boxes?

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call. There are limited numbers of boxes available. He can be reached at 403-345-5806.

## Trail 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 any trails be given up by former monitors. This is a new method to keep better track of trails and protect bluebird nest box habitat.

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## President's Report

by Joe Michielsen

Spring has arrived and our Mountain Bluebirds are back looking for their nesting sites. Hopefully, all the MBTCS members have had an opportunity to check their nest boxes, close them up if they were 'opened' for the winter, and get the boxes ready for the bluebirds. Steven Shumborski has provided us with renovation suggestions, which you can download from our website if any of the boxes require maintenance or you'd like to have a drop bottom for easy clean-out. Thanks to Four Seasons Home Comfort, we have metal flashing for the tops of our new nest boxes and even some extras for the ones that get destroyed in the field. Four Seasons donated the preformed metal last fall. Please call our box distributor Ken Mackintosh if you need some.

Speaking of nest boxes, our box builders extraordinaire have been hard at work and we do have almost 100 to give to members to add to their trails or replace old weathered/destroyed boxes. Don Gross is the latest addition to our box construction team.

Dustin Colwell, a Lethbridge College Environmental Sciences student, has been working on his/our mapping project, gathering the data and locations of all our boxes. He will have completed his work by the end of April. Steven Shumborski has offered to

## Bluebird Photography

Living on the Waterton River in Southwestern Alberta, I always look forward to the return of the many raptors and songbirds that visit our property. Nothing brings me greater joy though, than the first sighting of our Mountain Bluebirds. I have been following and photographing them for a number of years now and never grow tired of their beauty. A chance email from Steven Shumborski of the Mountain Bluebird Trail Conservation Society led to a discussion about becoming a member and monitor. So, here I am, and throughout this newsletter are some of my past pictures with many more to come.

I hope you enjoy them as much as I enjoyed capturing them.

Terri Vidricaire

## Mountain Bluebird Trail Conservation Society Executive 2017

President: Joe Michielsen

Vice-President:  
Steven Shumborski

Treasurer: Ken Moore

Secretary: Barb Glen

Directors: Jim Leitch  
Ken Mackintosh  
Gerry Kylo  
Jan Warren  
George Zuffa

## President's Report cont'd

become our new Trail Master. He came on board about a year ago and was elected as our Vice-President last fall. He has done a great job finding and repairing boxes in his travels to the west country. His bluebird box renovation suggestions include directions on how to improve your boxes so they have a drop bottom for easy cleaning. Thanks Steven, for all the great work. If you have not sent in your boxes GPS locations please get them to Steven or me, or if you need someone to come out to do that please contact us and we will arrange to have that done. It is important that we locate all MBT nest boxes so we can maintain and monitor them. We are continually getting reports of boxes in disrepair. We hope to continue working with Environmental Sciences students to further develop the mapping system and maybe develop a smart phone app that can be used to enter data in the field.

I have applied for our monitor license again but thus far, have not heard back from Alberta Environment. I will issue copies via email to our members once I receive it. In the meantime, please keep your 2016 copy handy just in case someone asks for it. Banding is still on hold since it is difficult to arrange for a mentor that I can use as a reference to apply for the license to become a Master Bander.

Jim Leitch will be holding his annual bluebird orientation session on May 27. Stay tuned to our website for full details. If there is enough interest, he may also hold a session in the Pincher Creek/Crowsnest Pass area.



### Nest Box Building

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society embarked on a nest box building program in 2015. Joe Michielsen negotiated the purchase at a discounted price for 60 sheets of three-quarter inch plywood from the Pincher Creek Co-op for nest box construction. A team of Goldie Weeks, Ken Mackintosh and Joe Michielsen cut the 60 sheets into nest box components, walls, floors and roofs to make 500 MBT nest boxes.

Now nest box builder Richard Crowe is supported by Don Gross and Bill Sanders in assembling the nest boxes in Richard's garage. They work on Tuesday mornings and evenings to complete 20 nest boxes in a work session. Richard has been assembling nest boxes for one and a half years and is working on nest boxes with numbers in the 300s. There are parts for another 200 nest boxes. The participants are enjoying the camaraderie and activity of working together on a worthwhile project.

Metal flashing for the top of the nest boxes has been donated by Four Seasons Home Comfort in Lethbridge. They have provided the flashing for 500 nest boxes.

Nest Box Pattern follows on Page 4.

## Distance between successful bluebird nest boxes, Twin Butte

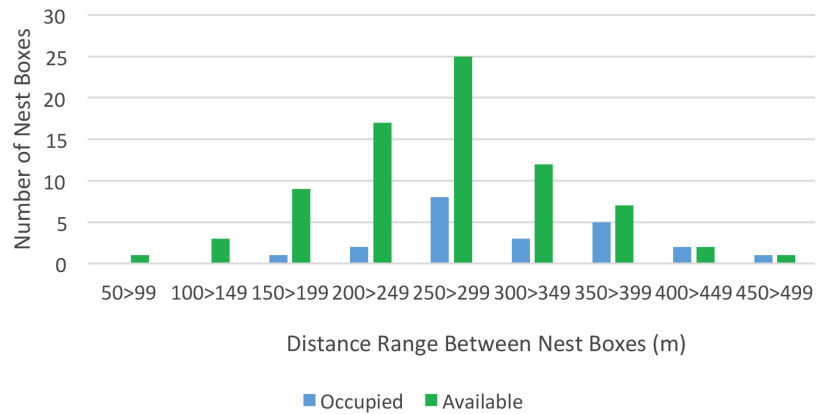
by Steven Shumborski

I have been curious about the spacing of bluebird nest boxes since I started monitoring a nest box trail at Twin Butte in 2015. By crunching the Twin Butte numbers for the 2016 nesting season, I found that 11% of the available nest boxes were occupied by bluebirds when the boxes were between 150 and 249 meters apart. For the 250 to 299m distance, 30% of the bluebird nest boxes were occupied. There appears to be a significantly higher number of successful bluebird nests in the Twin Butte area when the boxes are between 250 and 300m apart.

The shortest distance between two bluebird nests was 150m at a location where the boxes were on opposite sides of a large grove of willows which blocked sight lines from one box to the other.

The topography around Twin Butte is rolling hills with sloughs, native grassland with a mixture of pasture and clumps of poplars or willows. All of the nest boxes are mounted on posts along road allowances.

Occupied nest boxes vs available nest boxes



If you are interested in participating in the nest box construction, you can contact Richard Crowe through Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society.



# Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society



## NEST BOX PATTERN (May 2017)

- Use 8 x 1-3/4" wood screws and all weather glue
- Drill 1 9/16" entrance hole 2" below top of front, round off sharp edges
- Saw five 1/8" kerfs on inside of front @ 3/4" spacing below entrance hole
- Roof cut at 22.5 degrees
- 3 screws on front joints, 4 on back joints
- Use glue & screws to join front to sides & back to sides
- Install drop down floor with nails or screws
- Attach ridge cap
- Insert roof into ridge cap
- Mark inside of walls on inside of roof
- Join roof insert to roof
- Drill 3/8" vent holes @ 30 degrees upward
- Drill 1/8" holes across corners 1/2 way down front

MATERIALS: 3/4" fir plywood

Roof insert 5-1/4" x 4-1/4" (3/4 or 1" plywood)

Roof 10-1/2" x 10-1/2"

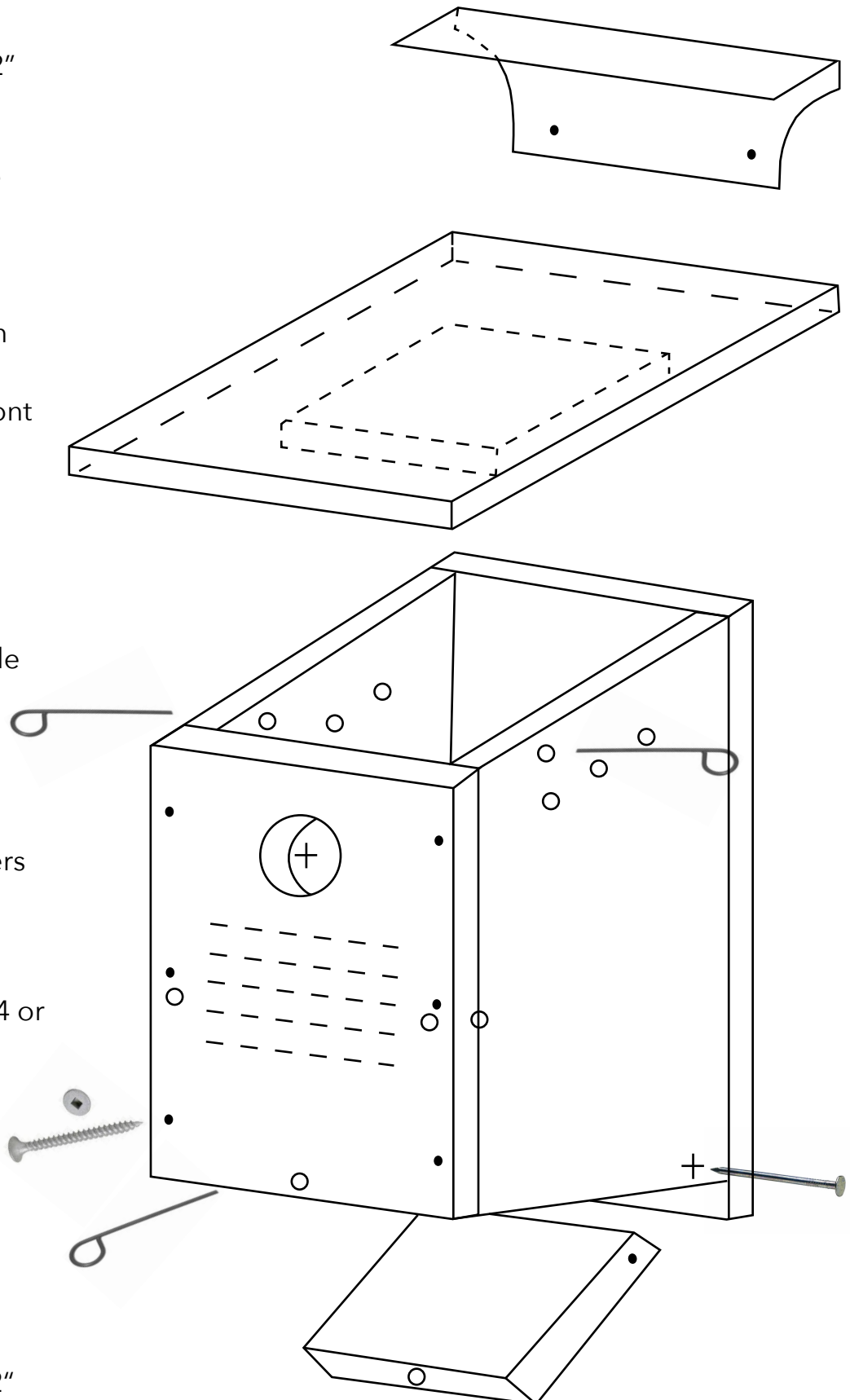
Drop Down Floor 5-1/4" x 5" (3/4 or 1" plywood)

Front 7" wide x 10-3/4" high

Sides 5-1/2" wide x 10-3/4" & 13" high

Back 7" wide x 14-1/2" high

Metal ridge cap L shape 1-1/2" x 3" x 10-1/4" long



## What's in your trail monitor kit?

Trail monitors have found the following items to be useful when checking boxes:

- Gloves
- Rubber boots
- Disposable mask
- Map of nest box locations
- County or M.D. map
- Monitoring sheets and pen
- Hammer
- Fencing staples
- Rags
- Duct tape
- Plastic bags
- Scraper
- Long flat screwdriver
- Extra box lids

## Thank-you

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society would like to thank the following individuals and businesses for their donations to our organization:

Telus

ATCO

Grizzly Media

Four Seasons Home Comfort

Family/Friends of the late  
Helen Dixon

*Juvenile Mountain Bluebird*  
Photo credit: © 2016  
Terri Vidricaire

## Trail Master's Report

by Steven Shumborski

As Trail Master I will be actively supporting the ongoing effort to inventory MBT nest boxes in Southern Alberta. This includes identifying where the boxes are located, tracking who monitors the boxes, as well as identify and locate boxes that are not monitored or are abandoned. Over the last 8 months Dustin Coldwell, an Ecosystem Management student at Lethbridge College, has been contacting trail monitors to get all their boxes in the MBT inventory. If you were not contacted by Dustin, or you think your boxes are not included in the MBT inventory, let me know and we will get these boxes added with GPS coordinates.

I will be organizing support to renovate the abandoned MBT boxes so they can be used by the bluebirds and tree swallows. I hope to develop a network of local people who work with wood and can renovate and maintain bluebird nest boxes. If you know of anyone in your area who is a bluebird supporter and is handy with woodwork, please have them contact me.

To all the monitors: When you are in your area or in your travels in Southern Alberta, are you aware of any MBT nest boxes that appear to be abandoned? The roofs are missing, they are full of old nest material, etc. Identify the location as best you can by Range Road and Township Road, identify the current status of the box(es) and mark them on the Section Sketch (found in the downloads section on the MBTCS website). Check with the landowner, if possible, to see if they know who was monitoring the boxes, and forward the information to me. Also, when you are talking to your neighbours or friends about bluebirds ask if they are interested in monitoring some nest boxes.



The minimum requirement for monitoring is cleaning the nest box once a year, either in the fall or before early April, and submitting a report to MBTCS by September 1 of the number of nests. The more frequent monitoring such as weekly or monthly will provide you with a window into the life cycle of the bluebirds and tree swallows. You will see all the stages from nest building, egg laying, incubating, rearing of the young, and finally the empty nest to clean after the birds have fledged. You will also encounter parasites, predation, and other users of the nest boxes like weasels and mice. It is a window into the complexity and interconnections of the creatures we share the land with.