

BLUEBIRDS

ANNUAL ORIENTATION SESSION JUNE 4, 2022

– DON'T MISS IT!

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society president Jim Leitch will hold his annual bluebird orientation session on June 4, 2022.

It is a great opportunity to visit a trail, learn more about what is involved in trail monitoring and see adult bluebirds, eggs and/or baby bluebirds.

The session often allows participants to see other bird and animal species as well – deer, swallows, marmots and other wildlife have been spotted in previous years.

Those interested in this free event will gather at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre in Lethbridge at 9 a.m. They will then carpool to the trail site. The orientation takes about two hours. For more information, contact Jim at 320-8970.



Grade 6 students from Canyon School in Pincher Creek install the nest boxes they built as a class project earlier this spring.

A new group of monitors

When teacher Derek Shackleford wanted to discover how his class could help mountain bluebird conservation, he contacted our Trail Master, Steven Shumborski to get the facts.

As a result, the class assembled 10 nest boxes from MBTCS supplied parts, and installed them near the school grounds. The nest boxes will be regularly monitored and students will hopefully have the opportunity to see bluebirds, eggs, nestlings and fledglings.

As reported in the Pincher Creek newspaper, Shootin' the Breeze, Shackleford intends to continue the monitoring project for years to come, starting with this year's Grade 6 students.

President's report

Mountain bluebirds back for another year: it never gets old!

By Jim Leitch

Spring is finally in the air with the return of the stunning mountain bluebird. We had an early sighting from one of our local members here in Lethbridge on April 2 at the Popson Park picnic shelter. There were also other sightings in other parts of the province as early as mid-March.

This is the time of the year when we make our first trips to our trails to prepare them for what we all hope to be a meaningful and fruitful bluebird nesting season. Thank you to all the faithful trail monitors who clean out their boxes, repair as necessary and ready themselves to monitor the wonder-filled nesting activity that is sure to follow. This never seems to get dull!

I will be once again have my annual half-day Trail Orientation Day on Saturday, June 4. We will take the morning to tour my trail at a farm on the west side of Lethbridge. This is a great opportunity for all birders, newcomers or those interested in having their own trail, to see what an active trail looks like. For information please visit our website at bluebirdtrails.org.

Due to the pandemic, we decided to shift our 2021 AGM to March 20. There were a number of highlights. First off, we had the opportunity to view a masterful short documentary on the nesting habits of a mountain bluebird couple here in southern Alberta. This wonderful piece of film was the work of local photographer and trail monitor Rick Andrews. To view this film, visit our website.

We also met Aaron Veale, a Master's student at the University of Lethbridge, who gave an interesting presentation on his thesis about hybridization between the mountain and western bluebirds.

Finally, we approved a motion to invest \$10,000 into an endowment fund through the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southern Alberta. The yields from this fund will ensure we have a predictable and steady revenue stream to support the society for years to come.

Once again, I would like to thank our Trail Master, Steven Shumborski, for all his hard work in finding, restoring and creating new trails here in southern Alberta. If there's a trail near you that is untended, please contact him at sshumborski@gmail.com.

Thanks also to our Web Master, Curtis Goodman, who does an excellent job with our website and responds to media requests for stories on the mountain bluebird.

I would like to say a special thank you to our retiring Treasurer, Ken Moore, who did an admirable job with the finances for the society over many years and also a big thank you to Jan Warren, who is stepping back from her role as a director, in which she served for many years.

We are pleased to announce our new incoming Treasurer, Kathy Koenig, as well as new Directors Connie Chaplin and Rick Williams.

As mentioned in a previous newsletter, we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2024. If you have any documents, facts or interesting stories that would help us recognize this significant milestone, please contact Curtis Goodman, our Web Master, through our website under the "Contact Us" tab.

Thank you to all the trail monitors for all that you do to support the beautiful mountain bluebird.

Have a great season!



Transfer of Bluebird Trails

**By Steven Shumborski
Trail Master**

Talking your friends into looking after a trail you are no longer able to look after leads to disaster. I regularly encounter this experience and an abandoned trail is often the result.

When you give your trail to a friend or someone you know, the communication connection with MBT is broken. There is no monitor agreement signed, there is no commitment to MBT to look after the boxes and report annually, or let someone at MBT know when you are no longer able to look after the nestbox trail.

So, when you are retiring from nestbox monitoring, let the President or Trailmaster know so they can arrange for an orderly transfer from the retiree to another person who is committed to looking after the trail.

When there is a change in monitor, I like to check the condition of the boxes and remove any fixed floor boxes for renovation. I also check the spacing of the boxes and relocate any that are no longer in suitable bluebird habitat. For example, the pasture surrounding the box may have been converted into a grain field.

Knowing the location of the boxes is essential to let the new monitor know the location and number of nest boxes on their trail.

Stats from Trail Master Steven Shumborski

First reports of bluebirds 2022:

Chris Weikert, Lundbreck, March 20
Blake Lowden, Beaver Creek west of
Head Smashed In, March 19

Nest boxes:

We have about 2,700 nest boxes and
106 monitors on record.

Trails

Trail sizes are decreasing to 20 or 30
boxes to create opportunities for
more people to be involved in looking
after trails. The website is attracting
interest in supporting bluebirds. As of
April 17, no trails were available.

Wide interest

Our website at www.bluebirdtrails.org
continues to attract attention, even
from Laramie, Wyoming, where a
school asked for a nest box kit so
they could build boxes for the
Guernsey State Park.

Box renovation and installation

Last fall and winter were active
seasons for renovation with boxes in
the Porcupine Hills, Pincher Creek,
Police Lake and West Lethbridge
areas renovated.

Contact the Trail Master

Steven can best be reached at
sshumborski@gmail.com, or by
calling 825-594-5222.

Bluebird hybrids: help needed with study

By Aaron Veale

University of Lethbridge

Western bluebird numbers appear to be increasing in southwestern Alberta, which suggests they are expanding their range. As they expand, low starting numbers may force them to breed with the more abundant mountain bluebird and produce hybrids.

This is what's known as the Desperation hypothesis or Hubb's principle. Eventually, as western bluebird numbers increase, it has been suggested crossbreeding with mountain bluebirds becomes more rare. Hybrid offspring would be hard to detect in the field and may only be found through genetic testing.

Our project is aimed at looking for first generation hybrids as well as birds that may have hybrid ancestors. To ensure we don't miss any sample opportunities, we need the help of citizen scientists and bird enthusiasts from within the community.

When cleaning out nest boxes, I ask that you keep an eye out for the following:

Eggshells – pieces with attached membrane

Old eggs or deceased chicks – place these in individual sealed zip-lock bags

Deceased birds – check for a band number on the legs, snip a toe off if you are comfortable doing so, put the toe in a ziplock bag. Also take a photo of the bird.

Feathers – these can be placed in bags or envelopes. The DNA is found at the base of the feather where it is inserted into the body. Handle the feathers from the tip (ie the part furthest from where it enters the bird).



Please keep samples for individual birds separate from one another and label each sample with the approximate coordinates or a description of where the sample was found.

To arrange for a sample to be collected, please contact our lab. We will arrange pickup for the samples in and around the Lethbridge area.

Additionally, any information on western bluebird sightings around nest boxes would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society for their help.

Email Aaron at: aaron.veale@uleth.ca

Mailing address:

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The Blue Bird

By D. Murray Mackay

We wait every spring for
the first to arrive
And to see their leader, we
truly do strive.
We wait for a twitter or a
flash made of blue.
You know when it's there,
it's spring, that is true.
You know it is spring and
that winter has passed.
You have your old friend so
you'll wait for the grass.

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Executive 2022:

President: Jim Leitch
 Vice-president: vacant
 Treasurer: Kathy Koenig
 Secretary: Barb Glen
 Trail Master: Steven Shumborski
 Web Master: Curtis Goodman
 Directors: Joe Michielsen, Ken Mackintosh,
 Gerry Kyle, Connie Chaplin, Rick Williams

The MBTCS is a registered charity and counts on donations to fund its work to provide habitat for mountain bluebirds.

Those interested in providing funds or learning more about bluebirds and bluebird nest boxes can contact the president at 403-320-8970 to obtain more information.



Photos by
Ray Huel



