

BLUEBIRDS

Fall newsletter: Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society

Annual meeting Oct. 28, 2017

WHO: Anyone interested in mountain bluebirds

WHAT: Annual General Meeting of the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society

WHEN: Oct. 28 at 2 p.m.

WHERE: Helen Schuler Nature Centre, Community Room, Lethbridge

WHY: To get up to date on society activities, obtain new nesting boxes, meet others who are interested in bluebirds and see some beautiful nature photographs

Need nest boxes?

MBTCS director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call if you need more boxes. There are many boxes available because our members have been busy building them. Ken can be reached at 403-345-5806. Call before the annual meeting and he can bring them for you to pick up at the AGM.



President's report

By Joe Michielsen

With fall comes the realization that another bluebirding year has come and gone and we, the members of the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society, have done our part to help the population.

The extremely hot, dry summer will have played a part in the success of this year's crop of bluebirds. Hopefully the late summer Kenow fire in the Waterton region didn't impact the bluebirds in the area but it did destroy some of the nesting boxes.

Fortunately we have replacements built so any member that requires some to either replace those burnt boxes or simply replace or add boxes to existing trails in the affected area or anywhere else can pick some up.

Ken Mackintosh has a good supply of nesting boxes ready for pickup. Please check your trail and let him know exactly how many boxes you need.

Trail Monitor Form

If you are monitoring a trail, please ask for and fillout 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 of keeping better track of trail and protect mountain bluebird nest box habitat.

Home, sweet old home?

MBTCS trailmaster Steven Shumborski, who monitors many nest boxes, has observed that bluebirds seem to prefer older, more weathered boxes over newly built ones when given a choice of the two in proximity. It's an unscientific study at this point, but an example of how careful bluebird observation provides constant education and food for thought.

President's report, continued

For those replacing boxes, please let Steven Shumborski know the box number being set up and the number of the box it is replacing.

If you're adding boxes, please locate the boxes with a GPS and give him the coordinates. Anyone requiring boxes should call Ken at (403) 345-5806 before our annual general meeting and he will bring them to the meeting.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held October 28 at 2 p.m. at the Helen Schuler Nature Center in the Community Room. We have asked Rick Andrews, a Lethbridge wildlife photographer, to show some of his photos which will include bluebirds and a snowy egret that he spotted at Lethbridge's Oldman River weir.

At the annual meeting we will have Jim Leitch talk about the nesting boxes built by a company from Calgary (DIRTT, or Do It Right This Time) and Steven will talk about some of his research on nesting boxes as well as the successes he's had mapping trails and boxes.

Dustin Coldwell, our Lethbridge College student, completed his work on mapping and contacting our membership and as you may know, Steven, is continuing the efforts to contact people that have MBT boxes so he can put together a more complete dataset and map.

We are searching for a new WebMaster amongst our membership. If you know of anyone interested, please bring them out or invite them to the annual meeting. Also, Don Stiles is hoping to attend the meeting and will speak on what the Calgary bluebirders are doing and how he might be able to help us band.

Please come out to the MBT Annual General Meeting. I'm looking forward to seeing you on Oct. 28.





WIN THIS BLUEBIRD SCULPTURE!

Everyone who attends the Oct. 28 annual meeting will be entered in a draw to win this sculpture of a Mountain Bluebird, donated by MBTCS director Jan Warren. See the first page of this newsletter for meeting details.

Did you know?

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society is a registered non-profit society and can issue tax receipts for donations of \$20 or more.

Donations can be sent to MBTCS, c/o Joe Michielsen, 2123 22 Street, Coaldale, Alta., T1M 1H6

Trail Master Report

By Steven Shumborski

Thank you to all the people who look after bluebird nest boxes and provide nesting habitat for the mountain bluebird.

The current MBT nest box count is about 2,000 and of those, about 1,600 have GPS coordinates. There are about 400 boxes that need to be located and added to the inventory. Collecting GPS coordinates for all the installed nest boxes is an ongoing project.

Many box locations were recorded in the 2002 Inventory and the information is available on paper. However, monitors have changed in the past 15 years and I continue to update the location information in electronic format.

Many of the nest boxes have been in service for 20 or more years and are in need of renovation. Among more recent design changes are a drop down floor for easy cleaning, a full roof and a metal ridge cap to keep out the rain. In some cases wall repairs are needed to extend the life of the nest boxes.

I have noticed on the old/new paired boxes on my trail that the bluebirds chose the old boxes every time. I will stain half of the new boxes in the pairs to see if the bluebirds prefer a grey stain to the new plywood. I will have the results next year in the fall newsletter.

As Trail Master I need to know if:

- *you need nest boxes renovated,
- * you have some carpentry tools and are interested in renovating nest boxes,
- * you need new nest boxes,
- * you are aware of someone who has MBT nest boxes and they are not on the MBT email list,
- * you know of someone who is unable to continue looking after their nestboxes and need someone to take over their trail, or you know of someone who is interested in looking after bluebird nest boxes.

Please contact me at sshumborski@gmail.com.

Mapping trails: what's the plan?

By Steven Shumborski

As Trail Master, I support ongoing efforts to inventory MBT nest boxes in Southern Alberta. This includes identifying where the boxes are located, tracking who monitors the boxes and identifying and locating boxes that are not monitored or are abandoned.

Over the last eight 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? Are the roofs missing? Are full of old nest material?

If so, please 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 in MBTCS website).

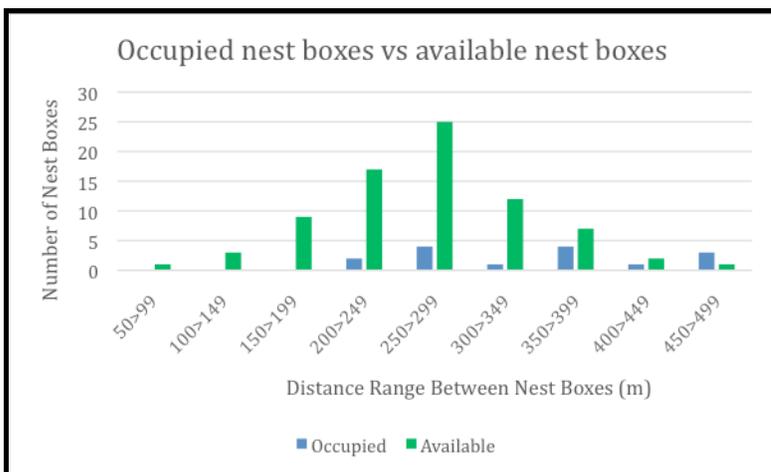
Check with the landowner, if possible, to see if they know who was monitoring the boxes, and forward the information to me. Also when you are talking to your neighbours or friends about bluebirds. ask if they are interested in monitoring some nest boxes.

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 Sept. 1 of the number of nests.

More frequent monitoring, such as weekly or monthly, will provide you with a window into the life cycle of 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.



Distance between successful bluebird nest boxes, Twin Butte

By Steven Shumborski

My curiosity about the spacing of bluebird nest boxes continues as I monitor a nest box trail at Twin Butte. The Twin Butte numbers for the 2017 nesting season show that nest boxes were occupied by bluebirds when the boxes were 245 or more meters apart.

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.