

BLUEBIRDS

Orientation session

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Jim Leitch will hold an orientation session June 2 for anyone interested in seeing a trail and what's involved in monitoring bluebird boxes. It is a chance to see bluebirds and their eggs and maybe even baby bluebirds. The session runs from 9 a.m. to noon, beginning at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre in Lethbridge. Jim will take participants on a tour of a nearby trail. There is no need to pre-register but if more information is desired, contact Jim at 403-320-8970.

Need nest boxes?

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society director Ken Mackintosh is the guy to call if you want or need nest boxes. The box building crews have been busy and boxes are available to replace old or worn out boxes or to expand trails. Ken can be reached at 403-345-5806.



It was a long winter. This photo provided by Clint Marr shows the depth of snow in the Twin Butte, Alta., area this winter, complete with Smurf-like snow hat on the box.

President's report

By Joe Michielsen

Spring has arrived (I hope) and our Mountain Bluebirds are back looking for nesting sites extremely late this year. I suspect some have succumbed to the inclement weather in March and the beginning of April (that's a nice way of saying crappy, cold spring).

Hopefully, all you MBTCS members have had an opportunity to check your nest boxes, clean out old nests,

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 you want or need to give up your trail in the future. You can find the form on our website, www.bluebirdtrails.org and you can return it to Joe Michielsen by email at joe.michielsen@hotmail.com.

Hello, bluebirds

The first reports of bluebirds seen this spring, via Trail Master Steven Shumborski, included a March 13 sighting by Cornell Van Ryk west of Pincher Creek, as posted on Facebook

Another March 13 sighting was reported on Alberta Bird, of two male bluebirds on Secondary Road 541 west of High River.

On March 14, Corrine Jerke reported seeing a male bluebird on her trail along the Oldman River west of Lethbridge.

The first sightings of the year are always exciting and worthy of note.



President's report, continued

close them up if they were opened for the winter and have the boxes ready for the bluebirds.

Last spring Steven Shumborski provided us with renovation suggestions that you can download from our website should any of your MBT boxes require maintenance or you'd like to have a 'drop bottom' for easy clean-out.

Please call our box distributor Ken Mackintosh (403-345-5806) if you need replacements for old 'worn-out' boxes or want to add some to your existing trail.

Steven Shumborski has been travelling the roads of southern Alberta, making phone calls and sending e-mails to locate our MBT nestboxes. He has now obtained GPS coordinates for more than 2,000 boxes but there are many still unaccounted for.

Not only has he put in hundreds of hours and thousands of kilometres to do this, but has repaired/renovated boxes he has located along the way that needed it. If you have still not sent in your box GPS locations, please get them to Steven or me, or if you need someone 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 neglected boxes in disrepair. Thanks, Steven, for your tireless efforts.

We have received our 2018 monitor permit. It was emailed to all members on our e-mail list on March 1, 2018. If you are an MBT monitor and did not receive it please contact me. You may or may not have noticed Alberta Environment failed to update the September end date to 2018 but regardless please print it and carry it with you when you are monitoring.

Jim Leitch will be holding his annual bluebird orientation session on June 2. The details are on the website and elsewhere in this newsletter. If there is enough interest, he may also hold a session in the Pincher Creek/Crowsnest Pass area.

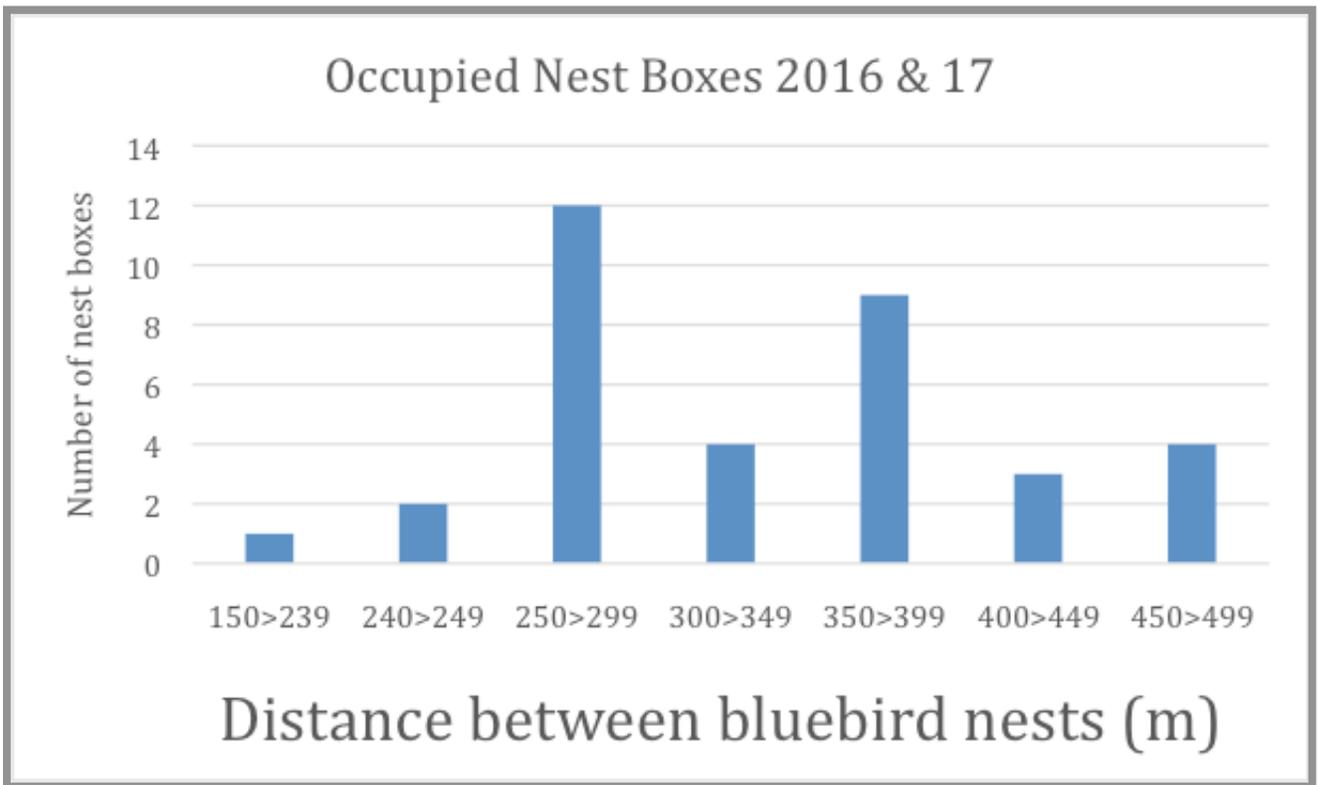
We will be setting up a MBT display at the Fort Macleod Homestead Show and Market (May 25-26), Pincher Creek Pro Rodeo (Aug. 16-19) and at Heritage Acres near the Oldman Dam (Sept. 15). If you're attending any of these events, please stop by and say hi.

We need to fill a number of positions on our MBT Board this fall. I will be stepping down as president and Steven has asked to step down as vice-president so he can focus on duties as trail master. Jan Warren, webmaster, is looking for someone who knows how to update and maintain our website to replace her. If you are interested or know anyone who would be, please let me know. Come to our meetings to see what is involved.

What’s the ideal distance between bluebird boxes?

By Steven Shumborski, Trail Master

I continue to be 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 and 2017 nesting seasons, I found that bluebirds most often occupied the nests when the nest boxes were more than 240 meters apart. The bluebirds like their space. A minimum of 250 m between adjacent bluebird nest boxes appears to be desirable. The topography around Twin Butte is rolling hills with sloughs and native grassland with a mixture of pasture and clumps of poplars or willows. All of the nest boxes used in this data set are mounted on posts along road allowances.



2018 Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society Executive:
 President: Joe Michielsen
 Vice-president: Steven Shumborski
 Treasurer: Ken Moore
 Secretary: Barb Glen
 Trail Master: Steven Shumborski
 Directors: Jim Leitch, Ken Mackintosh, Gerry Kylo, Jan Warren (who is also Webmaster)

We are looking for more volunteers to serve as directors and, as noted in the President’s Report, to take on some executive positions. 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 Joe at 403-345-4777 to learn more.

Trail society has 2,358 nest boxes ... and counting

**By Steven Shumborski
Trail Master**

Thank you to everyone who looks after bluebird nest boxes.

The current Mountain Bluebird Trail nest box count is 2,358 and boxes are regularly being added to the inventory.

Collecting GPS coordinates for the new and old boxes is my ongoing project.

Nest boxes that have been in service for 20 or more years are often in need of renovation. A drop down floor for easy cleaning, a full roof and metal ridge cap to keep out the rain, and repairs to walls as needed to extend the life of the nest boxes. There is a Renovation Suggestions file in the downloads section of the MBT website (bluebirdtrails.org) for anyone who wants to do their

own repairs. The best time to do renovations is after the nesting season.

I noticed on the old/new paired boxes on my trail last year that the bluebirds chose the old boxes every time. I have applied grey stain to 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 in the fall newsletter.

Regarding nest box cleaning and preparation, I have been wondering whether it is better to leave the floor down in the fall to prevent mouse nesting, or to leave the floor up so the nest box is ready for the bluebirds in spring.

I choose to leave the floors up in the nest boxes I monitor because a lot of things can happen between the fall when I

clean the boxes and spring when the bluebirds return.

I have heard this spring from a number of monitors who have been unable to visit the boxes to close the floors. So I suggest that after the boxes are cleaned in the fall they be left with the floor raised.

It is still important to check the boxes in the spring because they can suffer some damage through the winter. Roofs blow off, livestock rub on the box, or a mouse nests inside.

Keeping the floor up over the winter leaves the box ready for the bluebirds even if you are unable to get to the boxes until later in the spring.

If you know of anyone looking for a trail, or who is no longer able to look after their trail, please contact me at sshumborski@gmail.com



Many thanks to our nest box builders!

Shown here are Jim Penny, left, and Jack Sherman, who started assembling nest boxes last fall. Over the winter, they assembled almost 100 boxes.

Many thanks also to our other builders — Richard Crowe, Don Gross and Bill Sanders. These people make it possible to increase and improve our bluebird trails across southern Alberta.

The MBTCS has also been fortunate to receive donations of materials and/or services from a number of businesses, including Pincher Creek Co-op and Grizzly Media. There have also been a number of personal donations, for which we are extremely grateful. The MBTCS is a registered charity.

And one more thank you — to the Pincher Creek and District Chamber of Commerce and participants at the May 4-5 trade show.