



Dedicated to studying, conserving and helping restore the natural range
of the Mountain Bluebird in southern Alberta.

President's Message

Hi friends ...

I hope you've had a good year and that your bluebird trail was productive. I've had lots of Tree Swallows and I know a number of others have too. Hopefully, the weather co-operated with your birds and I hope your birds' sterile eggs were minimal.

This is just a reminder too that if you have any report on a Bluebird trail either as a bander or as a trail monitor to please send your information as soon as possible to Master Bander, Gwen Tietz, at gwen.tietz@gmail.com AND to Trail Manager Gerry Kylo at gkylo@shaw.ca.

This is my last message before our annual general meeting. I hope you'll be able to attend. The AGM is set for Saturday, November 16th, starting at 2 PM at the Fish and Game Association Club House, the corner of 9th Avenue and 10th Street South in Lethbridge. It's the same facility as in the past. The date has been moved a little later in the season than in previous years. The change was taken because our official year end is October 31st and then we can provide you with our year-end financial report.

We have an excellent guest speaker lined up: Ryan Heavy Head. Ryan is one of the most knowledgeable naturalists in southern Alberta. He's a teacher, a student of Blackfoot culture, and he's also employed by the city of Lethbridge to relocate "problem" rattlesnakes in the city. But he is much more than this. I hope you're able to come and listen to this interesting naturalist. So, mark your calendar.

We will also be voting at our meeting on a few issues. One issue, of course, is a new executive. If you'd like to join the executive I hope you'll let Ken Mackintosh know as soon as possible. Ken's email address is kejemack@hotmail.com. Let Ken know what position you'd allow your name to stand for and he'll take it from there.

There are also a couple of other things we need to vote on: one concerns membership and one involves changing our bylaws slightly to bring our constitution in line with the electronic world. If you have any other suggestions you can bring them up at the meeting. The meeting is designed to have your input. It's not meant as simply a rubber-stamp of proposed suggestions. We want your ideas to help our society function properly and efficiently so that we can work better and hopefully help our Bluebird friends even better.

Ken Moore
President, MBTCS



"Annual General Meeting"

Saturday, Nov 16, 2013

**10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Lethbridge Fish and Game
Club - 9Th Ave., S.**

**RSVP: 345-5806-Ken
Mackintosh
(kejemack@hotmail.com)**

Bird Mortality (no surprise here)

Tweety Bird had it right. His biggest enemy was a cat, though cats are far more efficient killers than Sylvester, the cartoon "puddy tat" who made a fool of himself in his futile pursuit of one canary. But Tweety's instincts were spot on. An Environment Canada study released Tuesday shows that more than 270 million birds are killed in Canada every year from human-related activity, which includes deaths caused by cats owned, or not controlled well, by humans. Richard Elliot, director of wildlife research for Environment Canada, said in an interview the estimated figure of 270 million is out of a total of 10 billion birds. "We've got a lot of birds, and that's probably a good thing because we're killing a lot." After cats, both domestic and feral, the biggest bird-killers are collisions with tall structures and road deaths. Combined, these three causes are responsible for 95 per cent of deaths.

Birds such as this yellowthroat are most threatened by cats or collisions with buildings. (J. Lascurain/Canadian Press). Because the research is so new, and there is still uncertainty about how exactly to determine the cause of bird deaths, the numbers are estimates, though scientists at Environment Canada are confident of the range of the numbers.

Most birds in Canada are protected by the 100-year old Migratory Bird Conventions Act, as well as the Species at Risk Act and various provincial wildlife acts that prohibit destroying nests or killing birds, but little is being done to shield them from the following top killers.



1. Domestic and feral cats: 200 million

There are about 8.5 million domestic cats in Canada, and 1.4 to 4.2 million wild or stray cats. Although feral cats are smaller in number than house cats, they're responsible for twice as many bird kills. Even so, cats by nature can be serial killers and don't just kill when they're hungry. Elliot said kitty-cams attached to cats' collars reveal that even house cats are avid hunters. "A cat you think is just out wandering around the premises would be killing 10 or 12 birds a night." Ian Davidson of Nature Canada said in an interview with CBC, "Our pets don't really understand the difference between an endangered bird species or not, so we strongly recommend people keep their cats indoors, especially around dawn or dusk."

2. Power lines, collisions and electrocutions: 25 million

Wind turbines, which have been blamed for bird deaths, accounted for only 16,700 kills. But wind power is expected to grow tenfold over the next decade.

3. Collision with houses or buildings: 25 million

Between two and five per cent of nuthatches, chickadees and pigeons may be killed after striking houses or buildings, the report estimates. Davidson suggests turning off lights in large municipal buildings, since birds are attracted to bright light, as well as muting reflections on the windows so they don't appear transparent to birds.

4. Vehicle collisions: 14 million

"Striking things," Elliot said, is a huge killer of birds.

5. Game bird hunting: 5 million

The report says extensive programs are in place throughout North America that ensure that any population-level effects of hunting are sustainable in the long term.

6. Agricultural pesticides 2.7 million

Electrical power and agriculture represent the largest industrial sources of bird mortality.

7. Agricultural mowing: 2.2 million young birds, equivalent to one million adult birds

One example cited are bobolinks, a protected bird, which nest in grasses and are killed every year by the cutting or clearing of grasses.

8. Commercial forestry: 1.4 million nests, equivalent to 900,000 adult birds

Activities that alter habitat during the breeding season, such as forestry and agricultural mowing, tend to destroy nests, eggs and young birds.

9. Communications towers: 220,000

Birds killed by flying into communications towers include kinglets and warblers.



Bluebird Monitoring & Hantavirus

(Ken Moore)

Bluebird nest box monitors and bluebird banders should take particular note when they are cleaning out nests from their boxes. Bluebirds usually raise two clutches of young in a typical year. And you should clean out your boxes between nestings.

However, caution should be taken when cleaning the boxes. Your health may be at stake. But it's not the bluebirds we have to fear; it's deer mice who may have made a nest in a box and not one of our feathered friends.

When cleaning out a bluebird box make sure you stand upwind. Also wear gloves, and a face mask is a suggested recommendation. After removing the old nest, whether bird or mice nest, clean the interior and spray the walls, ceiling and floor with a 10% bleach solution.

A mouse nest is something of particular concern. Deer mice, one of our most common rodents, may carry the hantavirus, which can produce HPS (Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome.) HPS can be a very severe condition and in a few cases has been fatal.

You may get hantavirus from being in contact with the urine, feces, or waste of infected mice. When you breathe in dust particles of this infected material you may become sick.

While hantavirus does not appear to affect the mice carriers, the virus can result in flu-like symptoms in humans before it develops into something more serious. According to the Canadian Lung Association (http://www.lung.ca/diseases-maladies/a-z/hantavirus-hantavirus/index_e.php):

"Symptoms usually appear about two to three weeks after being exposed to the virus. These early symptoms include: fever, muscle aches (especially in large muscles like the thighs, hips, back and shoulders), feeling very tired. Some people may also feel dizzy, get headaches and have stomach pain, diarrhea and/or vomiting. In the later stage of the disease (four to 10 days after the first symptoms start), you may have more serious symptoms: difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, coughing".

If you develop any of these symptoms you should seek medical help. While there is no specific cure, the earlier the treatment for HPS the better the chances of recovery.

Developing HPS is not common. It is a rare condition. But having said that there have been at least 24 cases of HPS on the prairies during the past 20 years and over that period there have been 7 associated deaths.

Our Alberta government states (<http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/hantavirus.html>): "Deer mice surveys for hantavirus were done in Alberta around a decade ago. Between four and 23 per cent of mice were positive. There was no correlation between the number of mice and the number of human cases."

This report is not meant to scare you; it is designed to remind you to take appropriate precautions when cleaning out your bird boxes. If you are using the latest bluebird boxes on your trail, at year's end it's best to leave your box floor down (or open) so that nothing (no mice) can enter the box over winter and develop a nest. Then at the start of next year before your bluebirds arrive, replace the floor to its usual position.

By the way, when you use rubber gloves to help clean out boxes make sure you disinfect the gloves after they are used. That means spraying them with a 10% bleach solution too ... before you clean out the next box.



Contacting us for replacement boxes



Another season is about to start and it is time to clean, repair and replace a few of those nesting boxes. You can contact the following people to obtain new boxes:

Ken Mackintosh, Coaldale
(403) 345-5806

Joe Michielsen, Coaldale
(403) 345-4777

Most of our boxes are now built by the “good” folks at the Lethbridge Correctional Centre. The Pincher Creek Co-op continues to donate plywood annually.



DID YOU KNOW...



Hummingbirds are small, colorful birds with iridescent feathers. Their name comes from the fact that they flap their wings so fast (about 80 times per second) that they make a humming noise. Hummingbirds can fly right, left, up, down, backwards, and even upside down. They are also able to hover by flapping their wings in a figure-8 pattern. They have a specialized long and tapered bill that is used to obtain nectar from the center of long, tubular flowers. The hummingbird's feet are used for perching only, and are not used for hopping or walking.

Hummingbirds primarily eat flower nectar, tree sap, insects and pollen. The hummingbird's fast breathing rate, fast heartbeat and high body temperature require that they eat often. They also require an enormous amount of food each day. Hummingbirds have a long tongue which they use to lick their food at a rate of up to 13 licks per second.

Like other birds, hummingbirds communicate via visual displays. Hummingbirds are very territorial and have been observed chasing each other and even larger birds such as hawks away from their territories.

There are 6 species of hummingbirds in Alberta. The Black-chinned Hummingbird (pictured), is the most widespread and common species in Canada and the western United States.

