

In the spring of 2010, I spoke with the Mountain Bluebird Trail Conservation society regarding my master's project on energy transfer from the aquatic ecosystem to the land. I was and still am, investigating whether emerging aquatic insects such as mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies make up a significant portion of the diet of the Bluebird and Swallow. I use stable isotope analysis to test how much of the diet of the birds is comprised of aquatic insects and terrestrial (land) insects. These isotopes are an extremely useful tool, as they work like tracers in the food web, and therefore, I can see what the birds have been eating and how much. However, the only catch is that the birds I collect must be juveniles because these birds migrate, and therefore, if I had an adult that arrived, their diet would reflect that of the over-wintering grounds. However, if the odd adult is found, we will gladly take this as well for future research.

The society has been very helpful and I really appreciate all the generous donations of birds that I have been given. Last spring, I was given approximately 100 dead chicks that I have been able to analyze using their feathers and muscle tissue. We have found that they are not eating a large portion of aquatic insects, but instead, it seems that they have been eating terrestrial insects, that may have been feeding on plants such as corn.

However, the sample size that we have is still quite small, and therefore, I am hoping that some of the members from the MBTCS will, again, be generous enough to donate to my research. I am looking for dead Mountain Bluebirds' as well as Swallows from members that have boxes in the Oldman River Basin. It is really important that all the chicks collected from different boxes are kept separate, so that we can accurately calculate their distance from the river and if you are able, I would really appreciate the GPS location of the boxes as well as the box number. Last year, I handed out information cards to fill out, which includes all the relevant information that I need, and I will again provide these cards.

I would like to give a special thank you to Gwen Tietz for all the amazing support that she has provided to me. Her passion for the MBTCS is truly inspiring. Also, I would like to thank Gerry Kylo, Les Sarsfield, Ken McKintosh and Fred Wishneski for their generosity and time. Please feel free to contact me at Allison.Becker@uleth.ca, or Gwen Tietz for information cards, or if you have dead birds for pick-up.