



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

President's Message

They're back !!!

I think the majority of people here in southern Alberta think of spring as soon as they see their first robin of the year. To me, spring is in sight when a thrush species returns as well, but the thrush which I associate with spring is the Mountain Bluebird. And they are back. Throughout the south, including points north of Calgary, there are numerous reports of Bluebirds. And if you're looking for some, check the boxes just north of the buffalo (or more correctly, the bison) paddock at Waterton. Three pairs of Bluebirds have been reported there.

I didn't see any in the latter part of February or the first week of March here where I live as I sometimes do. Perhaps they were delayed on their way north or perhaps I just failed to see them this year. But this very beautiful bird is here already so let's hope spring is here too.



If you're a trail monitor I hope you've already cleaned out your boxes and have checked to make sure that they are in good working order for our feathered friends. And if you still have yet to clean out your houses then please be cautious in case some mice nested in your box and left their usual mess. Deer mice can and do spread Hantavirus which humans can contract through airborne contaminants. Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) has affected at least 60 people so far in Canada since it was first noted in 1989 ... all of those cases here in western Canada. I might add that while I don't want to scare you, HPS has proved deadly in 20

cases. So take precautions. Use gloves, a mask, and a chlorine bleach and water solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) to spray the box after the debris has been removed. Stay upwind of the box when cleaning it if at all possible.

I hope you and your trail have a very successful year in 2013. And if you wish to band your baby birds then Gwen Tietz returns as our Master bander. This year's banding kits were sent out in early April to qualified banders. If you didn't get your kit, let Gwen know in early May (403-317-1252).

Speaking of Gwen, it is with sad regret that we announce that Gwen has stepped down from her executive position of Secretary-Treasurer of our Society. Gwen is working on the executive of the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) as well as Montana's and Idaho's societies and has been asked to help with the Calgary group. Because of this, Gwen feels that she is spreading herself, her talents and her time quite thin.

"Bluebird Orientation Day - Tour & Workshop"

Sunday, May 26, 2013

10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Meet at Coaldale Tim
Horton's - bring a lunch

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

President's Message (cont'd)

Gwen has served on our executive for many years for which we are truly grateful. Her role as teacher and mentor will be especially missed. After losing our Alberta registries standing and our federal charitable status Gwen singlehandedly worked to have both of these situations reinstated. And while we have thanked Gwen privately for all her efforts, I want to say quite publicly through this newsletter that we thank you Gwen for your tireless efforts, your talent, ability and experience for not only this achievement but for all your years of work in these areas.

Gwen remains as our Master Bander and we will continue to have her work with us in this capacity. It's only in the Secretary/Treasurer position from which she has resigned. And she'll no longer have to budget or allocate time to attend these executive meetings throughout the year.

Thank you, Gwen. Thank you very much on behalf of both the executives over the years and the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society membership. We really appreciate all you have done.

This brings me to one final point: if you have an MBT trail and it has not had its location coordinates mapped by GPS as of yet or if you know of an existing MBT trail which doesn't appear to have someone monitoring it then please contact Gerry Kylo, our trails co-ordinator. You can reach Gerry by:
email at gkylo@shaw.ca or by phone at 403-327-0120.

Now my friends, let's all help our Bluebirds continue on their comeback trail. There are many things we can do to assist them. The one main thing we can't control is the weather ... so let's hope that we have a very good spring, summer and fall so that the Bluebird numbers increase significantly in 2013.

Ken Moore
President MBTCS



“Bluebird Orientation Day - Tour & Workshop”

Sunday May 26th is the date for this year's Banding/General Information Tour and Workshop in Coaldale. Last year's event was well attended and was a resounding success. This year's leader is Ken Mackintosh who will be taking us to his trail along the Oldman River north of Tempest.



Please email Ken if you are interested in attending (kejemack@hotmail.com). Food will not be provided, so bring your own lunch. We will meet in the parking lot at the Coaldale Tim Horton's at 10:00 A.M.



Raccoons

Putting up a bluebird house is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. When you put up a bluebird house, a commitment is made to provide as safe as possible place for the bluebirds to raise their young. If this commitment is taken seriously, both you and the bluebirds will be rewarded.

Bluebirding is a great hands-on project but, from time to time, problems may arise on your trail. Common problems on a bluebird trail include the weather, swallows, wrens, and predators such as raccoons. We cannot control the weather, and swallows and wrens may prove to be difficult, but losses due to raccoons can and should be controlled. Proper bluebird house placement can be a factor in raccoon predation. Bluebird houses placed in pastureland are less likely to attract raccoons than houses placed near a wooded area with a stream, pond, or lake nearby.

There are two definite lines of defense against raccoons. The best way is to keep the raccoon off the house. The second is to prevent the raccoon from reaching into the house once it gets in a position to try.

There are many ways to predator-proof a bluebird house. Here are some methods used by experienced bluebirders.

MOUNTING SYSTEMS

The easiest way to mount a bluebird house would be to nail it to a wooden fence post tree. Although this may work well in certain parts of North America where there are few raccoons, it is generally not recommended. Taking the time to properly mount your bluebird houses, may take care of your raccoon problems.

A smooth clean pipe is the best mounting system to use. A 10 foot piece of 3/4 inch EMT electrical conduit pipe can be purchased for a reasonable price. It will then need to be cut down to a length of approximately 8 feet, to place 2 feet of pipe in the ground and 6 feet of pipe above. The electrical conduit is zinc plated and will keep its slick surface for many years. Other heavy round pipe will also work well. Scrap pipe found at construction sites and salvage yards can also be used. An excellent source of pipe is from overhead garage door companies. In their scrap piles from discarded doors you will find either an 8 foot or 16 foot piece of 1 inch pipe.

A method that works well for mounting lightweight bluebird houses (i.e., PVC boxes) is the use of a 5 foot piece of 1/2 inch electrical conduit slipped over a 5 foot piece of rebar driven approximately 2 feet into the ground. A conduit connector (with a longer bottom screw) at the base is used to keep the conduit from turning.



A bluebird house may also be mounted on PVC pipe. Some 2 inch PVC pipe will slip over a metal T-post, which makes a secure system when your box is located in a pasture with cattle. Mount your bluebird house high enough on the PVC so that the cattle will not have any sharp corners to rub against.

Reprinted from "Coveside Bird Houses" 

Grace Norgard

Grace Norgard has lived in the Claresholm area her entire life, on the family farm her parents purchased in 1926. In 1980, Grace and a friend, Hazel Hudson, joined the newly formed Mountain Bluebird Society of Southern Alberta under the direction of Duncan Mackintosh. Duncan helped them set up bluebird houses along Willow Creek west of Pultney. Says Grace, "We got only tree swallows in our houses, so after a couple of years, we moved the boxes to the Porcupine Hills. We added more houses and soon had beautiful Mountain Bluebirds raising young. We gradually expanded the trail to include over 130 birdhouses. Myrt Norgard joined me in monitoring the trail in 1998. At the end of the nesting season in 2003, we have fledged 4,386 Mountain Bluebirds, plus a few thousand Tree Swallows".

Since 2009, family members have attended to this bluebird trail and forward reports to Grace, to complete and send into the Bluebird Society.

In 1980, as members of the Lethbridge Naturalists, Grace and Hazel took part in the continent wide Spring and Christmas Bird Counts. Grace has been coordinator of the counts ever since. They now have up to 14 people counting birds in the 40 km radius of Claresholm each year.

Grace has been one of the pioneers of our society and we applaud her diligence and dedication to the Society and to the conservation and preservation of the Mountain Bluebird.



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.



Don Conrad

Calgary Area Nestbox Monitors, a.k.a. Calgary Area Bluebird Trail Monitors, lost one of its keenest members when Don Conrad passed away at the age of 80 on Feb. 24, 2013.

Don began as a bluebird trail monitor in 1999 when he set up 214 nestboxes in the Longview area. The next year he set up some more boxes on the foothills ridge SW of Nanton. He eventually built up these two trails to over 400 nestboxes for the years 2007 through 2010. In 2011, due to the failing health of his wife Joyce and his own failing health, he gave away part of his Longview trail to Mary Jane Hunter, and part of his Nanton trail to Mike Truch, leaving him with about 250 nestboxes. Joyce passed away in December, 2011.

Don would often give me a call after he had been out monitoring. I always appreciated these calls as I learned at what stage the nesting was (how many eggs or young) and this gave me an idea of when to go out myself to monitor my nestboxes and also to let other Calgary area monitors know what to expect. He would often give me anecdotes of what was happening on the trails.

Main occupants of Don's nestboxes were Mountain Bluebirds (MOBL) and Tree Swallows (TRES). Other occasional occupants were House Wrens and deer mice. Once he had evidence by claw marks that a bear had knocked a nestbox off the fence post west of Longview.

1999 was a poor year to start a bluebird trail as heavy rains occurred in late June resulting in over 75% of young TRES dying as the parents weren't able to feed them with flying insects. However it was never this bad again. His best year for MOBL was 2006 when he had 1022 fledged and his best year for TRES was 2007 with 1460 fledged.

Don Stiles, Calgary



DID YOU KNOW...



Killdeer are adept at distracting intruders from their nests or young. They employ one set of tactics against browsing animals that stroll unintentionally toward the nest of young and a quite different set against those that may wilfully do real harm, such as dogs, foxes, and people. An adult bird will run with outstretched wings or fly directly toward any browsing animal that appears on the verge of walking into a nest or stepping on a chick. There are recorded instances of a cow being struck on the muzzle. Once the intruder has been turned away, the Killdeer will allow it to graze peacefully nearby.

A different defence must be used against a deliberate threat, and this defence can be used by either parent. If flying around and calling loudly does not drive the intruder away, then one or the other of the parents performs a distraction display, commonly called a broken-wing act or injury feigning. The bird crouches on the ground with one wing spread and hanging as though broken. It flops about in a piteous manner, at the same time crying kill-dee-dee-ee as though in mortal pain. The intruder is drawn towards the seemingly wounded or helpless bird, which always manages to move away, decoying the intruder farther and farther from the nest of young birds. When the enemy is well away from its intended prey, the adult Killdeer miraculously recovers and flies off. During this display, the young will have stayed perfectly still or will have scattered in all directions. In either case, they will be almost impossible to find.

