



Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society

Volume Four ~ Spring 2004

Editor: G Tietz

They're Back!

Bluebirds were spotted in many places this spring, here are some of the reports:

"Thought you might be interested that Peter and I just saw 7-8 Western Bluebirds just outside the warden office. At least 4 males. As far as I can tell it's the first record for the park." March 12, 2004, Cyndi Smith, M.Sc. Conservation Biologist, Parks Canada, Waterton Lakes National Park

"David and Jean Carter have reported bluebirds in the Lebanon School area on the Thelma Road on March 6 and at St. Margaret's Church on March 18." Carol Porter, MBT, Medicine Hat, AB

"I spotted a number of BB's, some were doing their mating 'beak clicking'. I saw a lot more males than females." March 28, 2004, Joe Michielsen, east of Coaldale, AB.

"Look outside in the front yard, there is a male on our bluebird box". R Tietz, March 20, 2004, Moon River Estates/west of Lethbridge, AB.

Let's all hope that this fine weather sticks around for our feathered friends to enjoy. I am sure everyone will agree, we really could use some moisture but not all in one day like in the past years!

Recently, on made a trip to the Police Lake area, in southern Alberta, we spotted many birds on their way through to breeding grounds farther north. A few of the species we spotted were Red-tailed hawks, Swainson hawks, many bald & golden eagles, a pair of nesting Great Horned Owls, Ferruginous hawk, Sandhill Crane, Swans, countless waterfowl. Ah yes Harold, and your beloved bluebirds have returned to their homeland one more time.....

Let's all hope that this year will bring back the bluebird in great abundance!

Happy birding in 2004!

And may your trails be plentiful!

Contacting MBT:

P.O. Box 401 Stn Main
Lethbridge, AB T1J-3Z1

(403)553-2646

email: mtn@telus.net

Check out our new
website:

<http://www.mountainblue.ca>

Table of contents:

President's Message 2
Bluebird Crossing!

Calgary Zoo Research & BB 3
Thanks!

MBT registration 4
Please Come!



G Tietz

President's Message

It is with great pleasure to inform our trail monitors that for the third year Mountain Bluebird Trails has received a donation of ten 4 x 8 sheets of fir plywood from The Pincher Creek Cooperative Association. Our dependable nest box manufacturer, Dave Friebel of Cowley will create close to 100 boxes and extra roofs/lids. The strong winds which occur occasionally can be depended upon to remove roofs and scatter them far and wide.

If you are a trail monitor in need of replacement boxes, lids or want to extend your existing trail, contact any member of the board. Les Anderson of the Claresholm area will also have some nestboxes for monitors in that vicinity. Les Phone: 403-625-3821.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find a notice and an application for a Regional Bluebird Conference in Hamilton, Montana. It will be held May 21, 22, and 23. It will be jointly sponsored by Mountain Bluebird Trails of Montana and the Ellis Bird Farm. It is hoped that regional conferences might be held every two years. Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society of Alberta (our group), Calgary Bluebird Group and Southern Interior Bluebird Association(BC) have indicated to try and join the Regional Convention Rotation.

If at all possible do try and make the Montana Convention to share knowledge and get to know our fellow Bluebirders. A registration form is on the back of this edition of our newsletter, please try and attend.

Your executive hopes by this fall to have some Bluebird Crossing signs for sale. They will be 12 x 12, yellow background with a male Mountain Bluebird in color.



They will look similar to a highway sign, but definitely not intended for highway display. Place one on your trail, back yard or rumpus room. Price as yet has not been set, however, they will be affordable.

May Mother Nature look down on us with favour, granting a mild, early spring, many successful nesting pairs and a paucity of predators and other problems.

HAPPY BLUEBIRDING IN 2004!



~ Ray Harris ~

Bluebirds and the Center for Conservation Research at the Calgary Zoo

An article for the MBTCS newsletter, prepared by Keith Gibson and Tian Dalgleish, September 23, 2003.

What does the Centre for Conservation Research at the Calgary Zoo have to do with bluebirds? Well, three years ago members of the MBTCS came to the Zoo looking for assistance in developing a predator-resistant nest box design that they could retrofit to their boxes in southern Alberta. Nest box predation is not a new challenge for bluebirds in other areas of the country but the trail monitors had some specific needs that meant that modifications developed in other areas could not be directly applied. For instance, the boxes needed to remain on the existing fence lines, withstand livestock, and be an easy, inexpensive retrofit.

Our zoo keeper took nine designs that MBTCS members developed, baited them with the favourite treats of the Zoo's raccoons, and then individually mounted the nest boxes on a fence post in the raccoon enclosure. From these trials, two designs that the raccoons found particularly frustrating were selected. Les Sarsfield then fitted 2/3 of the boxes on his trails with these two new designs, leaving the remaining 1/3 as standard nest boxes. Of course, predator-resistant boxes are only useful if bluebirds use them, so over the next two years, Les and our researchers monitored the boxes to see how well they worked in the wild. We'd like to answer three questions with the data we now have: (1) do the modified boxes affect nest predation, (2) do bluebirds nest in the modified boxes as often as the standard boxes, and (3) do the nest box modifications negatively affect bluebird nesting successes? We plan to have the answers by next spring and we'll keep you posted!

The second aspect of our bluebird work involves looking at the health of bluebirds in southern Alberta. We're fortunate at the Calgary Zoo to have a very highly qualified veterinary team with extensive experience in both gathering health information from small wild birds and interpreting the laboratory results. Over the past two years we've collected data from Les, Harold Janecke and Gwen Tietz's trails so we can begin to define baseline health values for bluebirds. We'd also like to see if healthier birds react to a potential predator differently than unhealthier ones. To that end, we conducted some behaviour trials this summer to see if there is a link between health and behaviour. We will be analysing these data over the winter and will let you know what we find.

MBTCS members are working very hard, taking care of thousands of bluebird boxes across southern Alberta. Several of your members have raised concerns about deformed chicks they have seen on their trails. We'd like to ask for your help in addressing these concerns. Please let us know about any deformed chicks (bluebirds or tree swallows) that you see in your nests. We are also interested in deformities you have seen in the past. You can contact us by phone at 403-232-9391 or by email at [tand@calgaryzoo.ab.ca](mailto:tian@calgaryzoo.ab.ca). Together, we can keep an eye out for any problems with bluebirds and the ecosystem in which they live.

With the cooperation of MBTCS members, we hope to continue to study these wonderful birds and to help keep them returning to Alberta. We welcome any questions or input and will keep you apprised of our findings. Our thanks to Les Sarsfield, Harold and Francis Janecke, and Gwen Tietz for their wonderful knowledge and support.

At the Annual General Meeting in October, 2003 the Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society presented the Calgary Zoo with two beautiful framed photographs of male mountain bluebirds in appreciation for the continued work and efforts they make towards assisting us with the Mountain Bluebirds. Many Thanks!



MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAILS, INC.
REGIONAL BLUEBIRD MEETING
MAY 21-23, 2004



HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS
HAMILTON, MONTANA
CO-SPONSORED BY ELLIS BIRD FARM, LACOMBE, AB

MEETING SCHEDULE

FRIDAY - MAY 21ST - 6:30 P.M. - RECEPTION at LUKE & JENNIFER CHANNER'S HOME

SATURDAY - MAY 22ND - 9:30 A.M. - PROGRAMS & BUSINESS MEETING

(Continental Breakfast & Lunch included)

6:30 P.M. - NO HOST COCKTAILS, BANQUET & SPEAKER

DOOR PRIZES & AUCTION

SUNDAY - MAY 23RD - 7:30 A.M. FIELD TRIP TO SEE WESTERN BLUEBIRDS

TO REGISTER AT HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS, Hamilton, MT

Call: 1-800-465-4329 (US and CANADA)

or 1-406-375-2525

ROOM RATES: \$69.00 Single or Double

Tell operator you're with "Mountain Bluebird Trails Meeting"

~~~~~TWO SPECIAL DRAWINGS~~~~~

FOR PEOPLE STAYING AT HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS ONE PERSON FROM MONTANA AND ONE PERSON FROM OUTSIDE MONTANA WILL HAVE THEIR ROOM PAID FOR BY MBT

For further information visit Mountain Bluebird Trails website at www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com or call or e-mail: Bob Niebuhr (406) 453-5143 – blubrdbob@prodigy.net or John Denton (406) 333-4916 – bigjohn@wispwest.net

	# PEOPLE	THRU 5/6/04	AFTER 5/6/04	TOTAL
FRIDAY NIGHT - No Charge	_____	N.C.	N.C.	XXXXX
ALL EVENTS	_____	\$39.00	\$45.00	_____
SAT - PROGRAMS & LUNCH	_____	\$27.00	\$30.00	_____
SAT - BANQUET ONLY	_____	\$17.00	\$20.00	_____
			GRAND TOTAL	_____
SPECIAL DIET REQUESTS	_____			

NO REFUNDS AFTER MAY 6, 2004

MAIL REGISTRATION TO: MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAILS, 600 CENTRAL AVE., SUITE 320, GREAT FALLS, MT 59401

Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society of Southern Alberta

VOLUME 4—FALL 2004

The “Mystery” of the Vanishing Eggs

G. Tietz

It appears that when all is taken into consideration, the now annual late inclement weather patterns, the mountain bluebirds seem to have had a not so bad year after all. Have a close look at the complete statistics enclosed in this latest edition of our newsletter. Successful mountain bluebird nests increased dramatically compared to the past three years. The amount of actual eggs laid by the bluebird increased by over 40% this year.

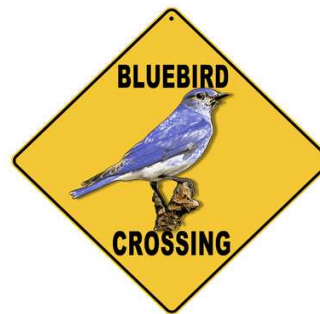
Sadly, there was another freak storm this past spring that caused yet another anomaly to occur. There were many reports of bluebirds arriving and staking out their boxes and actually laying what would normally be the first brood. Many females had started incubating their clutch and an early spring storm blew in. Not to be discouraged the females set about nesting over the first clutch that they had abandoned.

Strangely, depending on the timing

of the nests, eggs were witnessed to actually “disappear” from the boxes containing clutches prior to the storm. And, this strange pattern of “missing” eggs were witnessed in boxes were the clutch was laid immediately after the storm.

What (or whom) caused these eggs to disappear? Your guess is as good as any. Many think that the female (and/or male) actually perform housekeeping duties and dispose of the eggs they know are incapable of hatching. Younger females seem to simply build a new nest and lay a new clutch right over top of the first clutch.

I, for one, know that as I cleaned out my boxes this late summer I was astounded by the amount of eggs entwined amongst the blades of grass. One can only continue to wonder how much the repeated laying of clutches over and over in a single year can take a huge toll on the physical resources of the females.



**For Sale! Great Gift! Contact Us!
403-627-1935 CVC Farms**

Again, all considered, the female bluebirds (with the help of a male) managed to successfully fledge 4545 birds.

Hooray! That sets us all up for the return of our blue feathered friends in the Spring of 2005.

So, keep those eyes to the skies, and hope our “grandkids” have a happy and safe journey this winter. And may they return to us in 2005.



Harold Janecke, Lethbridge

(403) 327-8426

Note: Ken has nestbox pipe available for anyone that has problems with raccoons. Please call him directly to gain further information on usage of this pipe.

Contacting Us for Replacement Boxes

Another season has come to a close and it is time to clean, repair and replace a few of those nesting boxes. You can use these people as a contact to obtain additional boxes:

Les Anderson, Claresholm

(403) 625-3821

Dave Friebel, Cowley

(Factory fresh units available)

(403) 628-2230

Ken Mackintosh, Coaldale

(403) 345-5806

Inside this issue:

President's tips n' tales	2
MBT Executive Listing	2
Pioneer Bluebirders	3
16 Years of Memories	3
Donations	4
Raccoons-The Outcome	4
MBT Products—GIFTS!	5
Blue Feather Award	6
2004 Statistics & Recoveries	7 & 8

Annual General Meeting of 2004

- Saturday, October 20th
- 1:00 to 4:30
- Fish & Game Building (9 Ave S)
- Guest Speakers:
Cyndi Smith, Parks Canada Biologist
Linda Cemey, Alberta Conservation Association
- Refreshments provided
- **RSVP: 553-2646**
- \$5.00 donation (costs)

President's tips n' tales

Les Sarsfield, an MBT Director was monitoring his trail this spring and spotted an hawk upside down swinging on a barbed wire fence. Upon examination it was securely caught by a foot in a leg trap which was wrapped around a wire. Les opened the trap and released the bird.



I was unloading my pickup recently at our side driveway and left the driver's window open. Some time later when I decided to move the vehicle I heard a "Small Cheep". On the back seat was a a rather distressed Black Capped Chickadee, panting and wings splayed for support as there being no suitable perch. I gently removed it to a spruce tree branch and 20 minutes later it had departed.



Doug Levasseur, of Ohio, past president of North American Bluebird Society reported he had several third nestlings of Eastern Bluebirds. Think of our banding numbers would increase if we were blessed with three broods.



I have been banding Bluebirds for 23 years and Tree Swallows for the past decade. This year I banded 252 TRES. Of interest to me was a recovery this year of an AHY-F TRES. I banded her as a nestling July 1997. Seven years of trouble free border crossing without two photo ID's.



MBT has had a Bluebird Trail the past six years at Heritage Acres, just below the Oldman River Dam It was started as part of the North American Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. For the first five years, nary a Bluebird nest, although we had early spring sightings. This year was a time for celebration. Wilbur Tripp, the trail monitor, informed me he had a MOBL nest with six nestlings. The following day I banded same. Hope springs eternal.



MBT has had a Bluebird Trail the past six years at Heritage Acres, just below the Oldman River Dam It was started as part of the North American Transcontinental Bluebird Trail. For the first five years, nary a Bluebird nest, although we had early spring sightings. This year was a time for celebration. Wilbur Tripp the trail monitor informed me he had a MOBL nest with six nestlings. The following day I banded same. Hope springs eternal.



Bob Niebuhr, president of MBT, Montana tells us "for the past three years a pair of White Breasted Nuthatches had nested and raised five nestlings in a box. This year they moved one box down and laid five eggs. One of the five nestlings was an albino.



Another rare albino nesting this year was reported by George Loades, Calgary Bluebirder, who has a trail at Jumping Pound, west of Calgary. This time it was a TRES nesting pair with six nestlings, one of which was a true albino, pink eyes.



Deanna Lippert, a longtime Bluebird Trail monitor, phoned me last week of July to tell me she had a TRES nest with two eggs. One a TRES, the other a MOBL. They both hatched and then later fledged. That TRES must have been quite busy feeding both.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAILS EXECUTIVE

Ray Harris, President, Porcupine Hills, 553-2646

Harold Janecke, Vice-President, Lethbridge, 327-8426

Duncan Rand, Secretary, Lethbridge, 329-0534

Gwen Tietz, Band Manager, Newsletter Editor, 553-2780

Ardell Harris, Treasurer, Porcupine Hills, 553-2646

Les Sarsfield, Director, Lethbridge, 328-5957

*Eastern Bluebirds
spotted in Medicine
Hat, by Carol Porter
and in Barrhead by
Judy Boyd & Dorothy
Hazlett.*

Pioneer Bluebirders Remembered

WINNIE ELLIS - 1905 - 2004

Winnie, sister of Charlie Ellis, was born in Jumping Pound, Alberta. Charlie and Winnie moved with their parents in 1906 to homestead in the Lacombe area of central Alberta. After their parents died Charlie and Wine remained on the farm, where they continued to operate a mixed farm operation.

A trial nestbox was put up in 1955, and within a few years they had about 300 nestboxes. In addition to maintain this extensive trail, Wine, together with Charlie began to transform their farm yard to a sheltered haven for wildlife. Orchards and flower gardens were planted to attract native birds. Water ponds were established to attract water fowl and deer.

Bird baths and a plethora of feeders were spotted around the yard. For the winter feedings Wine would stir up case loads of apples and raisins and Charlie would serve the hungry birds on pie plate feeders.

In the 1980s Union Carbide purchased the farm land, on the condition that the Ellis Bird Farm legacy would be preserved by means of a non-profit charitable agreement. Dow Chemical is now the owner, purchasing Union Carbide.

Charlie died in 1990. Winnie later became a resident in a senior's lodge in Lacombe. She maintained an active interest in the "farm" visiting the site each summer to admire the birds, ponds and gardens.

A living legacy.

NORA LANE - 1908 - 2004

John and Nora Lane, a husband and wife team, were singularly responsible for the beginning of the Bluebird Trails beginning in southern Manitoba. John was a CPR conductor, working out of Brandon. Once in the early 1950s, while "sidetracked", he noticed a pair of tree Swallows trying to nest in a small protective sleeve covering a wire cable. His vision was clear as the penny dropped. The secondary cavity nesting birds needed help.

John married Nora McKenzie, a school teacher in 1935. The two met and shared an interest in bird watching and the hobby formed a 40 year marriage. They had two children, Bob and Anne.

In 1959 Lanes' records indicated they had not seen a Bluebird in thirty years. That same year, under Nora's guidance John started the Brandon Junior Birders Club. The club needed a focus, John remembered the tree Swallows trying to nest. Thus began the building of nestboxes. The husband and wife team began the foundation of the "Great Trail of Canada". West from Brandon to Broadview Saskatchewan, Brandon south to the International Peace garden.

Nora and John were charter members of the North American Bluebird Society, and an annual award from this society is presented annually in their name.

HAROLD HUGHES - 1920-2004

Harold was one of the original coterie of Bluebirders joining Duncan Mackintosh in the late 1970s. He was the first MBT-er to build nestboxes to satisfy the great demand in Trail expansion. By 1994 he had built 3000 nestboxes, and was recognized by his peers in being the recipient of an Outstanding Contribution to Bluebird Conservation Award.

Harold was born in Calgary. His parents later moved near Enchant to homestead. Finishing high school he then graduated from the Olds School of Agriculture in 1940.

Harold then enlisted in the RCAF training as a Wireless operator and Air Gunner. He married Olga Chutskoff of Calgary in 1943 while on embarkation leave, just prior to being shipped overseas. Three sons were born to Harold and Olga, Roger, Terry and Greg.

After the war they returned to Enchant and farmed till 1970. Harold and Olga then joined CUSO and had five years of posting at Sierra Leone and Papua, New Guinea.



16 Years of Memories Our Bluebird Trail

by Bev Jette

Jack (Jette) and I moved to the Buckhorn Road in April of 1988. That summer while our daughter and two children were visiting, a lady came to check on the Bluebird Houses and Stephen (our oldest grandchild) wanted to see what was in the box so we went over and the lady showed us six tiny bluebirds.

Jack was hooked - he loved all kinds of wild-life, we had bird feeders in the back yard, hummingbird feeders and enjoyed watching the deer, elk, a moose or two and even the odd bear going by.

When the MBTCS asked whether we would like to take over the trails on our road - he said a big YES. He took care of the trail from 1989 until March of 2004 when he died.

He put in "second" houses after it was suggested, moved houses that had never been used, knew every house that ever had bluebirds in it. It was a great experience and one that Jack enjoyed.

Special Thanks!

MBT
P.O BOX 401
LETHBRIDGE
AB
T1J-3Z1

www.mountainblue.ca

Terry Shannon
of the Crowsnest
Pass banded 6
Western Blue-
birds this year!
That is a first!



Donations (*graciously accepted*)

The work of the Mountain Bluebird Trails Society is done by volunteers. Trail monitors and board members put in many hours on behalf of the bluebirds. There are of course expenses such as postage, photocopying, computer supplies and so on which are paid for by donations. Mountain Bluebird Trails gratefully acknowledges donations from the following people in the last twelve months.

G. Tietz
F. B. Keeling
D. Sample
H. Cain
A. J. Macintosh
G. Norgard
Macintosh family
D. Mikaldson

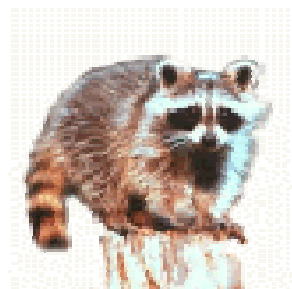
Raccoon Box Design ~ The Outcome

The Calgary Zoo, in conjunction with MBTCS of Southern Alberta engaged in a project to investigate the effectiveness of various box designs to prevent raccoon predation. Recently we were presented with the complete report on the outcome of the trial made primarily on trails in southern Alberta.

"Two nestbox designs were compared to a control design with respect to box use and nest success for mountain bluebirds and tree swallows. A preliminary experiment showed that the tunnel and mesh designs discourage raccoon access into boxes in captivity. Two years of field data show that these designs do not adversely affect blue-

bird box use or nest success in the field. Consequently, either design would be a valid approach to discouraging raccoon predation in the field. However, anecdotally, we suggest the tunnel design as being a more effective predator deterrent. Our results also show that tree swallow nests occur less frequently in tunnel and mesh boxes than in control boxes and this may be a useful way to discourage tree swallows from nesting in a box."

A comprehensive paper has been received by MBT with a complete data set for reference use. For a copy of the publication, by the Calgary Zoo, please contact Gwen Tietz @ 553-2780.



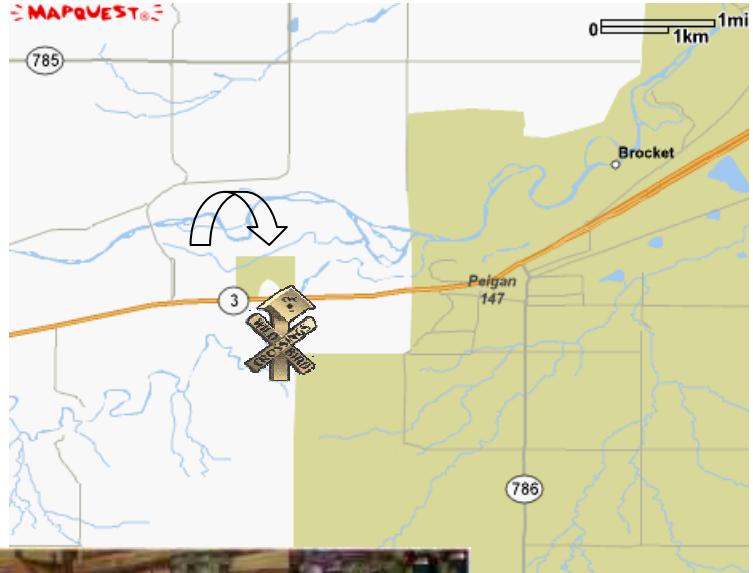
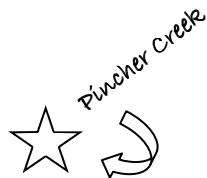
CVC Farms

Southern Alberta Largest Supplier of birding supplies and feed.

They carry **all** of the **MBT** products!

Need a special Christmas gift?

Visit CVC Farms and see our **vest, golf shirts, lunch/benches and more!**



The year has come to a close and it is time to thank each and every one of you for all the efforts maintaining your trails. There is no other way to say it~ **Special Thanks!** Without the continued support of everyone we would not have the great success we experience each year. Feel free to contact us if you feel we could assist you in any way. Remember! We love your input! And do we ever love to relay those "trail tales". Send your stories to Gwen Tietz via snail mail: P.O. Box 401, Lethbridge, T1J 3Z1. Email: info@mountainblue.ca.