



President's note

We've had lots of interesting developments since the last newsletter. First, we have a new Newsletter Editor, **Brian Coffey**. Brian also got our website up and running. He has put in all the old newsletters and it contains the information on the upcoming conference including the registration form. Here is the address of the website, it isn't pretty, but it's free:

http://www.lethbridgelink.com/business/bus_detail.asp?bPageID=346

The conference that was mentioned in the fall newsletter has taken shape thanks to the hard work of our committee: **Linda Cerney, Brian and Shelley Coffey, Jan Warren, Lori Goater** and myself along with others working in the background. All the details are part of this newsletter. We've got an interesting group of speakers, including our banquet keynote speaker **Lorne Fitch**, and a variety of tours that should interest everyone. We're starting it all off with an evening wine and cheese and nature walk at the Helen Schuler Nature Centre on May 28. If anyone knows a business or person that would like to donate to the event, it would be appreciated. There will be a silent auction and a live auction as well. Hope to see all of you there!!

There were some changes to our executive last fall - **Jan Warren** is our treasurer now that **Duncan Rand** has moved to Calgary to be closer to his family. **Brian and Shelley Coffey** and **Gerry Kylo** are new directors.

The Lethbridge Correctional Centre carpentry students have continued to make boxes so we have a good supply available.

It feels like spring is here, now all I need is to see our bluebirds back to confirm it! See you at the conference!

“Information Seminar/Banding Workshop”

Saturday, April 24th, 2010

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Fish & Game building

1001 9 Ave South

Lethbridge, AB

\$10 fee (lunch & refreshments)

Limited Seating!

Mentors needed!

RSVP: 553-2780-Gwen

345-5806-Ken



Anniversary Workshop MAY 28-29, 2010

"VIEWS FROM THE TRAIL"

30 YEARS OF STEWARDSHIP WITH MBTCS

LETHBRIDGE • ALBERTA • CANADA

**Mountain Bluebird Trails
Conservation Society**



Registration ends April 30, 2010

Check the web site for registration information

http://www.lethbridgelink.com/business/bus_detail.asp?bPageID=346

Copies of the registration form will be available at the Nord-Bridge Senior's Centre and at the Helen Schuler

This anniversary workshop will celebrate long-term dedication to conservation and education in southern Alberta, particularly recognizing the significance of fostering first-hand connections between people and their natural landscapes.

Keynote Speaker - *Lorne Fitch*

Alberta Fish and Wildlife (retired), has worked in various positions including Fisheries Biologist, Regional Habitat Biologist and Regional Fisheries Biologist. His presentation is "Rocks and Trees and Grass and Critters - Alberta's Other Treasures".

Other speakers include:

Gwen Tietz, Master Bander, will talk about the history of MBTCS
John Dormaar, author and scientist with Agriculture Canada (ret.), will speak on the geology, history, flora and fauna of the Milk River.
Theresa Burg, Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Lethbridge, will talk about dispersal patterns in resident North American birds using genetic markers.
Dr. Gordon Chalmers, DVM, will talk about flight, nutrition and birds' on-board compasses.

Field trips:

Dusk walk (Lethbridge Nature Reserve), Morning bird walk (Lethbridge Nature Reserve), Mist-netting and bird banding demonstration (Lethbridge Nature Reserve), Mountain Bluebird trail, Great Blue Heron rookery, Wetlands viewing at Michelson's Marsh (Stirling), Wildflower walk, Grassland/Coulee/Rattlesnake hike, Alberta Birds of Prey Centre (Coaldale).

**WINE & CHEESE SOCIAL
FIELD TRIPS
INTERESTING SPEAKERS
AND
OLD FRIENDS**

Your Consideration Is Appreciated!

Some of you have practiced a method for many years that may not be in the interest of MBT in the future.....if you remove bands provided from the strands provided, “pre-open” them and place them in/on an independent “container” prior to use you may not be aware of the unintentional weakening of the band. If you do not use these bands and rework the band, a second time, in order to return them at the year end, you have stressed the material in the band. In the last two years of banding I have had to destroy quite a few “fatigued” bands in order to not cause possible stress or injury to a banded bird.

Most of you will notice the poor material of the bands provided to us in 2006 by the banding office. When these bands in particular are opened, closed and reopened multiple times, they rarely close properly. Remember, a band cannot be placed on a bird if it inhibits movement in any way, hence it is destroyed. Happily, the bands received since 2006 are of a much better material from a new supplier so this problem should eventually fade with time.



Each of the MBT banders are provided with complete and new packages each year. All “left over” bands on strands returned are used the following year by two

banders. “Used” defective bands are reported as destroyed and cannot be used. Band supply is of concern and all of us wish to continue to band in the future. Please help us reduce the amount of destroyed bands to insure all of us the right to band in the years to come.

Thanks once again for all your tireless efforts.

Gwen Tietz, master bander

DID YOU KNOW...

The Mountain Bluebird Trails Conservation Society (MBTCS) works directly with other bluebird societies, the government (Environment Canada/ Parks Canada) and the Calgary Zoo. MBTCS is part of the North American Bluebird Society which has adopted part of the Trans-Continental Bluebird Trail at Heritage Acres, near Pincher Creek.

2010 Spring Banding & Monitoring Packages/Workshop

As usual, the Spring 2010 Banding & Monitoring Packages are distributed with this newsletter. In the event that you might require additional bands throughout the season please do contact Gwen at 553-2780 or 317-1252.

April 24th there will be another Banding/General Information Workshop in Lethbridge. Please call Gwen if you wish to assist with the event. This has been an overwhelming success in the last 4 years! Our membership has grown significantly and we now need some help getting to all the new volunteers. If you would like to mentor a new monitor or bander, please contact Gwen.



May 28 & 29 is the celebration of our 30 years as a group of dedicated volunteers. Do spread the word to everyone you know and help us make this a joyous celebration. I hope to see all of you there; I can hardly wait as I get a chance to spend some time with a great group of similarly interested individuals. Come one, come all! If you feel you can assist us by volunteering at the event, contact us!

Gwen Tietz, master bander

Mentors, Monitors and Banders NEEDED!

Mountain Bluebird Trails Society is always interested in increasing its membership. We have a number of 'trails' in southern Alberta that need monitors. Monitoring involves cleaning the boxes before the bluebirds return in March and being sure the boxes are in good repair. All boxes need to be cleaned at least once per year, with the old nests removed, because bluebirds or other birds build a new nest on top of the old nest. There needs to be a several inch space between the nest and the box opening to prevent the nestlings from fledging prematurely.



Our members, like everyone, lead busy lives so we always need experienced people, mentors, to go out with new monitors and banders to show them maintenance requirements and proper handling techniques. Banding the bluebirds is a bonus! Banded bird information gives us and The Canadian Wildlife Service an idea of how well the bluebird population is doing. Banding needs to be done properly to avoid injury to the birds while they are being handled or after if the band isn't put on properly.

New banders **MUST** attend one of the workshops put on by our Master Bander Gwen Teitz. Besides providing information, Gwen explains the why's and how's of taking care of a trail and banding. Presently we have members that would like a trail near Lethbridge; however we have limited open trails in this area. There is a need for monitors and banders in most other areas of southern Alberta especially along the foothills or just east of the foothills. Gwen will be holding the next workshop in Lethbridge on April 12. If you would like to attend this one day session let us know - contact information is also on the website. We are in the process of compiling maps of all MBT boxes in southern Alberta. If you have an area you feel would be suitable habitat for starting a new trail, we have boxes available.

100 Years of Bird Banding in Canada

Source: Environment Canada

OTTAWA, September 22, 2005 - Billions of migratory birds leave Canada each fall after breeding season, travelling south to winter destinations in the southern U.S.A., Mexico, the Caribbean and Central or South America. This fall will mark the 100th anniversary of Canadian efforts to track the destinations of our migratory birds.

On September 24, 1905, James Henry Fleming placed a band on the foot of an American Robin in his backyard in Toronto, Ontario, in the hopes of discovering where it went for the winter. One hundred years later, over 900 banders place bands and markers on over 300 000 migratory birds each year in Canada.



"Bird banding is used throughout the works, as a basic tool for bird research and monitoring," said the Honourable Stéphane Dion, Minister of the Environment. "Banding allows biologists and wildlife managers to study behaviours and ecology, monitor populations and protect endangered species. The study of birds can also be used to address human health and safety concerns such as West Nile virus through capture and taking blood samples."

Environment Canada's Bird Banding Office and the United States Geological Survey's Bird Banding Laboratory have jointly administered the North American Bird Banding Program since 1923.

More than 66 million birds have been banded in North America with close to 4 million encounters for 980 species and subspecies since 1908. Banding and recovery data collected in Canada contribute to ornithological research and the conservation and management of North American migratory birds throughout the Western Hemisphere.

"The information that has gathered in the last 100 years of bird banding in Canada has been phenomenal for the scientific study and conservation of birds," said Minister Dion. "Ensuring we have sound science information behind our decision making is key to the Government of Canada's overall approach under *Project Green*, our broad environmental vision that links Canada's economic competitiveness and prosperity to a sustainable future."

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a bird band was a simple hand stamped aluminium band placed around the leg so a bird could be identified and tracked. Now, a century later, that same method is still used, except for birds that spend a lot of time in the water require bands made of stainless steel.

Bands come in different sizes and designs to accommodate a variety of sizes of birds. Hummingbirds are so small that each band must be cut and individually shaped for each bird, whereas larger birds of prey such as hawks and eagles require lock-on or rivet bands so that they cannot be removed by powerful beaks.

Some studies require that individual birds be identified from a distance. In these cases, other marking devices such as colour bands, neck collars, plastic streamers, wing tags, nasal saddles, feather clippings, and paints or dyes are sometimes used in addition to the basic bands.

Canada's bird banders are highly skilled in bird capture, handling, identification, aging and sexing. Banders must hold a scientific permit issued by the federal government to capture and band migratory birds.

The North American Bird Banding Program relies on the public to report found bird bands. Canadians who find a banded bird or a bird band are asked to note as much information as they can about the bird and its band and contact the Bird Banding Office (http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/nwrc-cnrf/migb/bbo_e.cfm) or toll-free at 1-800-327-BAND.



The Government of Canada's activities for the protection and conservation of migratory birds are part of the *Project Green*, a set of policies and programs aimed at supporting a sustainable environment. *Project Green* addresses environmental initiatives for the 21st century including measures to conserve our biodiversity, protect our water, and clean up contaminated sites.

For more information about bird banding or assisting as a volunteer with a banding project, contact one of the many bird observatories across Canada. Volunteering is the best way to learn the challenging skills necessary

to become a bird bander. For a list of bird observatories across Canada view the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network website at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/cmmn.html>.



Message from the President

I'll start on a positive note. Our May conference/workshop was a success thanks to the hard work and perseverance of the organizing committee. Everyone I talked to, that attended was impressed with the array of speakers and the chance to talk bluebirds. Despite the cool, wet weather the attendees managed to get out for a while at lunchtime to see the snakes or the Bird's of Prey Center.

Speaking of cool, wet weather, this spring made for an extremely tough time for the bluebirds and many other birds. It was cold and wet enough that even some adult birds succumbed. I was hopeful on my first check of my boxes with the number of nests that had been started, but several never got past that state probably, in some cases, because one or more of the pair of bluebirds died. I ended up with very few clutches and no second nests probably due to the late first brood. Other MBT members reported lots of dead nestlings and a few dead adults.

Today I picked up 12 more sheets of plywood from Pincher Creek Co-op – they donated half. When I delivered the plywood to Lethbridge Correctional center, I was able to pick up about 50 new boxes that the inmates had completed building using the last sheets of plywood supplied by the Co-op. So if anyone needs boxes Ken Mackintosh and I have some available.

Hopefully our bluebirds have a safe journey south in the nice Indian summer and are more successful next year. One more positive note – I was just outside of Waterton Park yesterday and saw a flock of at least 50 bluebirds.

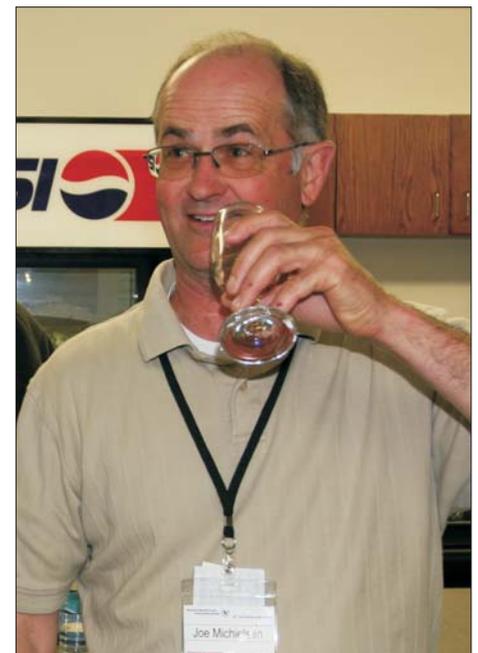
“2010 Annual General Meeting”

*Saturday, October 30th, 2010
2:00 p.m.*

**Lethbridge
Fish & Game building
1001 9 Ave South
Lethbridge, AB**

**Guest Speaker: Don Stiles
Calgary Bluebird Assoc.**

\$10 fee (*membership & refreshments*)

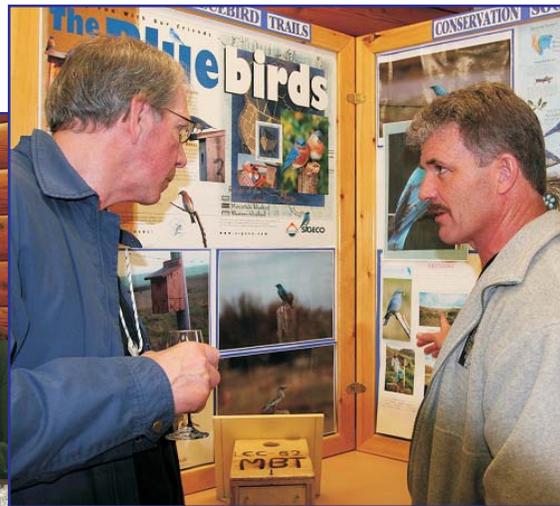


President Joe Michielsen

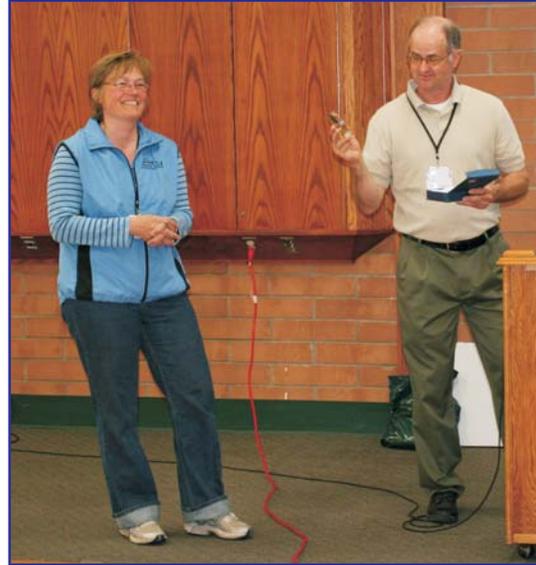
Bluebird Conference 2010

The conference was well attended with excellent speakers, good food and good friends (some old, some new). After a snowy morning, the weather cooperated enough for the field trips to take place.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our volunteers and our major sponsors - Mountain Blue Accounting (Gwen Tietz), BDO Accounting (Wayne Etches), Government of Alberta and the Helen Schuler Nature Centre.



Bluebird Conference 2010



Master Bander's Report

Seems another year has come and gone in the bluebird world, weather was definitely an issue again. As I combed through the remitted statistics this year I was struck by the continued efforts of our group. It always amazes me how positive the comments even in times when it appears the efforts take a negative hit. So very many dead nestlings again this year, wow I was almost scared to open those boxes some weeks. That proved to be a good thing for Alison Becker from the University of Lethbridge as she needed dead nestlings for her research, I can't wait for results as I know we provided her with enough for quite a few tests indeed!

In 2010 we had 3 long term members leave for health reasons, we continue to maintain the trails. This is reflected in the decrease of the amount of boxes counted in the total available boxes. I find it interesting the amount of bluebird eggs was consistent even with the decrease in boxes reported. Does the bluebird know of the impending weather causing extreme deaths? Just a thought...

Some changes coming again for MBT, I believe change is always good. I had requested the luxury of working in the field with the new recruits this year and last. I have been very satisfied with the progress MBT has made in generating new members. I will continue to instruct banding workshops and assist recruiting the next generation of members, what a wonderful legacy for the founding members.

An interesting note, today I spoke with Ken Mackintosh and as usual most of us wonder where the bluebirds seem to disappear to prior to their migration south. Well, my husband & I were on a "lumber run" in the Pass this weekend...found the bluebirds! We had several flocks flit around the truck as we loaded wood. Seems they love the cleared areas, it must be easier to find food during the days. The flock was mixed and had adults and obvious juveniles, what a wonderful site after such a dismal year.

Hope all is better next year, can someone put in a request with old mother nature? Goodness, I would love to see a more stable year in the weather department. I imagine our bluebirds feel much the same!

Happy trails!

Gwen

Master Bander/Data Compiler

DID YOU KNOW...

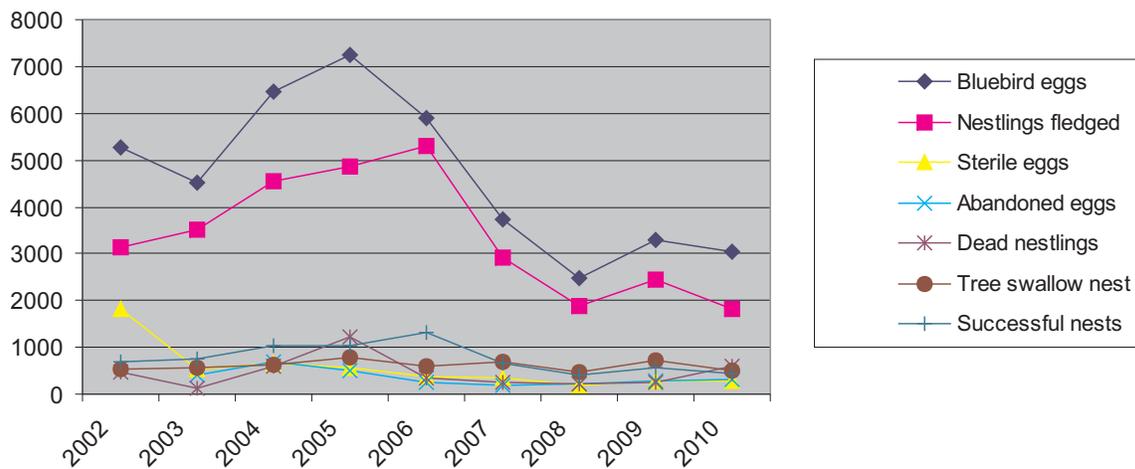
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2010 Statistics

Detailed Statistics 2004 to 2010

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Boxes available	2062	2162	1907	1629	1164	1710	1270
Successful nests	1026	1024	1331	655	405	578	436
Bluebird eggs	6453	7237	5900	3739	2483	3286	3049
Sterile eggs	660	579	363	352	187	296	289
Abandoned eggs	684	503	241	189	213	284	327
Dead nestlings	596	1230	352	264	219	259	608
Nestlings fledged	4545	4866	5296	2914	1891	2447	1824
Adults banded	106	154	77	92	54	52	71
Nestlings banded	2701	2583	3149	1663	1151	969	920
Recoveries	96	103	77	45	32	28	54
Tree swallow nests	623	788	609	675	482	716	506
Wren nests	18	49	22	29	41	82	71
Sparrow nests	36	39	63	54	29	16	21
Stolen/vandalized	57	52	27	140	10	7	6
Used twice	302	428	306	216	171	282	93

2010 MBT Stats



An example of a good relationship between a landowner and an MBTCS member. This is south of Pincher Creek.

2010 Statistics

Annual Summary of the Eagle Butte Mountain Bluebird Trail

Item	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of Nests		47	45	35	26	40	48	75	59	74	67	103	55	88	71	78	78	65	97	70
First Brood	26	30	32	28	22	31	38	45	54	52	49	67	46	60	56	65	59	52	53	53
Second Brood		17	13	7	4	9	10	30	5	22	18	33	9	28	15	13	19	13	44	17
Successful Nests			33	31	22	31	42	57	50	69	48	36	40	64	63	68	58	55	53	44
First Brood			24	26	20	24	35	38	49	49	38	11	34	38	54	58	46	45	19	31
Second Brood			9	5	2	7	7	19	1	20	10	25	6	26	9	10	12	10	34	13
Eggs		254	224	171	142	191	267	415	379	407	337	554	272	475	389	436	392	353	520	359
First Brood	151	162	171	147	128	151	220	267	348	306	263	372	234	312	336	380	316	305	306	285
Second Brood		92	53	24	14	40	47	148	31	101	74	170	38	163	53	56	76	48	214	74
Sterile Eggs					20	17	33	25	99*	73*	126*	292	30	67	33	49	46	23	60	59
First Brood					14	14	25	11	88	35	67/22	240	25	47	26	39	35	17	25	47
Second Brood					6	3	8	14	11	6	19/18	43	5	20	7	10	11	6	35	12
Abandoned Eggs									8	7	35		39	84	22	25	39	17	147	60
First Brood											17		30	68	10	20	29	13	125	55
Second Brood											18		9	16	12	5	10	4	22	5
Dead Nestlings					0	0	4	25	20	8	0	88	1	24	2	29	52	34	90	51
First Brood					0	0	4	14	8	8	0	82	1	22	2	24	41	30	88	46
Second Brood					0	0	0	11	12	0	0	6	0	2	0	5	11	4	2	5
Nestlings Fledged	139	202	152	136	111	158	206	292	239	324	211	174	202	300	332	322	255	281	223	189
First Brood	139	127	114	115	104	123	181	217	236	235	174	50	175	175	298	291	211	245	71	137
Second Brood		75	38	21	7	35	25	75	3	89	37	121	27	125	34	31	44	36	152	52
Tree Swallow Nests	31	26	26	17	25	38	47	43	52	45	45	29	25	26	31	22	39	42	33	41
Wren Nests	2	3	8	8	5	4	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	1
English Sparrow Nests		0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4	6	4	1	0	1	0	0
Boxes Damaged, Stolen, Etc.	3	1	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Boxes Used More Than Once		19	20	8	7	13	15	39	11	25	20	42	14	38	26	26	29	25	59	23
Number of Boxes Not Used	0	2	7	5	9	3	2	1	0	2	4	3	13	2	1	1	3	2	0	0
Number of Boxes	59	60	64	57	59	72	82	83	103	98	99	102	82	83	84	82	89	86	86	86
Miles of Line Monitored			24	24	24	25	30	30	34	34	34	34	30	30	30	30	30	33	33	33

A note from Ernie Whelan, now living in southern B.C.

“I was going around the nesting boxes one morning checking to see whether some of the young bluebirds that I'd banded a few days ago were still alive after our recent spell of cold, wet weather. At one box, I lifted the lid, peered in, and nearly died of shock. There was a bloody big snake. In the hope that it would leave, I kicked the post and box, and to my amazement a large rattler reared it's head and hissed at me. Not to be outdone, I got a long stick and poked at it through the hole, staying on my toes ready for a strategic, rapid retreat. Lots more hissing, and head and tongue waving, and I'd guess from the thickness of the body that it was at least 1.5 foot long, diamond back rattler. I eventually decided that discretion was the better part of valor, left the lid off, and left the snake to finish digesting it's breakfast. I hope the metal bands on the young birds legs give it indigestion.



I went back the next day and the box was completely empty. Let's hope that one such encounter is enough.”

MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF BIRD MIGRATION



If we didn't have the knowledge acquired over centuries by ornithologists and naturalists, how would we explain where migratory birds go in the autumn? Here are some theories from antiquity accounting for bird migration.

Birds Fly to the Moon for the Winter

Many birds fly at high altitudes while they migrate-Bar-headed Geese

cross the Himalayas at 9,000 metres (29,500 feet)-far out of sight of human observers on the ground. The ascent of migrating birds in the fall, apparently headed into space, probably inspired the belief in the Middle Ages that they went to the moon for the winter.

Birds Changing into Something Else

Atlantic Puffins have brightly coloured bills only in the breeding season; the Piping Plover loses the black on its head and chest in winter; in many species, the male, female and juveniles look quite different from each other. This type of physical variability in birds proves that they can change their appearance and made it logical to early philosophers and scientists that a bird absent in winter had simply changed into something else. Sophocles thought that the Hoopoe and the hawk were the same bird, and others believed that the Cuckoos and Sparrow Hawks

Little Birds Riding on Big Birds

Many people once thought that small birds migrated by riding on larger birds. Ernest Ingersoll writes that, in the late 1800s, Egyptians believed that storks and cranes carried wagtails across the Mediterranean on their backs because the smaller birds could not fly that distance (p. 81). Today, we know that wagtails migrating from Europe to Africa gain weight before the trip, storing enough excess to travel across both the Mediterranean and the Sahara. Migration routes typically cross the Mediterranean at its narrowest points; wagtails arriving in Egypt may follow a land route around the eastern end of the sea.

Birds Spend the Winter in Caves and Trees

Some bats hibernate in caves and mines, so why not birds? Groups such as swallows and swifts were widely believed to hibernate in caves and hollow trees-a logical assumption for birds that nest and roost in these locations in summer. In reality, some swallows and swifts migrate more than 10,000 kilometres (6,000 miles), travelling in flocks during the day and feeding on flying insects as they go.