

Brandon Friends of the Bluebirds

Fall 2014 Newsletter

A Not So “Bluebirdy” year

As it turns out 2014 was not a bluebird year. Our problem wasn't really with nest success but with the number of bluebird pairs. A few of the members had very low numbers having only two or three pairs of bluebirds nest on their lines. An extreme case of this lack of bluebirds was observed by a club member named Bonnie Hill. She has twelve boxes located between Wawanesa and Glenboro. Bonnie didn't see any bluebirds, the only one she saw was one that was already deceased. Also many people had lines without Mountain Bluebirds. All the pairs seen been Eastern Bluebirds. Last year it seemed as though the Tree Swallows were in decline and were not having a good year, as we were seeing a lot of mortality of the nestlings and even a few of the adults were dying. This was not the case this year. It seemed as though the Tree Swallows were taking up the majority of the boxes. The spring was very hard on the Bluebirds as it came late and was quite cold for quite some time. Not only that but because of the late spring Tree Swallows arrived at about the same time as the bluebirds which meant that the Bluebirds did not have a chance to establish a nest box. Another problem this spring brought was rain; and lots of it. Of course lots of rain means lots of water, either preventing monitors from getting to the boxes, or in some cases it appeared that the Bluebirds just didn't responded well to the wet and rainy conditions. Hopefully next year will be a more “bluebirdy” year.

First in a While

For those unaware this is the Friends of the Bluebirds first Newsletter for quite a while. So this will be issued every spring and fall for those who are interested in what is going on within our club. Our newsletter will contain stuff like population trends, nestbox data, member's experiences, member's photos, member articles, quotes and poems about bluebirds, etc.

I cannot produce this newsletter without your help. Members, if you have any stories, interesting observations, articles, photos, poems, quotes, anything! Please do not hesitate to send them to me either via email or through the postal services. My contact information can be found below or on the final page of this newsletter.

Erica Alex

Box 248, Minnedosa,
MB

R0J 1E0

jjalex@mymts.net

Mouse Mania

At the meeting a lot of members were mentioning a mouse problem. Luc Gamache said that over the course of the summer he found three boxes that mice had made use of. Although it was not the kind of usage you would expect. Instead of using the boxes as nests the mice used them for storing food. Two of the three boxes were filled with thistle seed, the other filled with about two inches of canola seed. Luc said that there were no canola crops around so where the mice got the seed is a mystery.

I also had an experience with mice this fall. My Mom, Dad and I were out doing fall cleanout and removing lids in preparation for winter. The first couple of boxes were empty as the birds had fledged and the boxes were cleaned out weeks before. So we continued on and found at the start a mouse nest in a box, then another box had a mouse nest in it. But all contained no mice, until we opened up the next box on the line. It was filled all the way to the top with a mouse nest, so we sprayed it with a javex and water mixture to disinfect it to keep any dust particles from flying around. Once we did that we started pulling out the material, and with the material came the mice. There were mice flying everywhere! One even squeezed out of the drainage whole in the bottom! All in all there were about eight mice in the box.

An Unexpected Vandal

I have a small 16 box Bluebird line near Onanole MB on some grassland property just south of my summer cabin. I have had this line for some 7 or 8 years. I took it over from friends Les and Delia Mine when Les passed away. It has been a fun line to monitor and maintain because it is within walking distance of our family cabin. As such, I am able to take my Grandchildren with me on my monitoring trips. It has also been a good conversation starter with neighbours giving me a chance to expound on Bluebird conservation. It is a productive line for Swallows but one or two Bluebird nests is the norm. During one of my mid-summer monitoring tours I was shocked to see the first box torn from its post lying smashed to bits on the ground. My first thought was that it was the work of vandals. As I came across 5 more smashed boxes --- one with an iron fence post bent over like a pretzel and other tell-tale signs it dawned on me that I had a bear problem. It was part of summer when the young had hatched and were a third to half grown. I guess the bear (once it tasted the first fledges), appreciated them as appetizers so much that it went in search of more. There had been numerous bears sighted in the vicinity and when I finished my tour for that day, I encountered Natural Resource officers setting a bear trap nearby. The good news is that because Bluebirds nest earlier than Swallows, the sole Bluebird nest of fledges on the line were gone before their nest-box home was smashed. So, I have some boxes and posts to replace before next season and a hope that the offending bear was caught and moved far, far away.

And that is my bear story!!

- Herb Goulden

Number of lines reported:	50		
BOXES		SUCCESSFUL NESTS	
Used	1371	Mountain Bluebirds	67
Empty	194	Eastern Bluebirds	383
Total boxes	1565	Unidentified Bluebirds	26
		Tree Swallows	602
NEST ATTEMPS		Wrens	30
Mountain Bluebirds	104	Chickadee	1
Eastern Bluebirds	533		
Unidentified Bluebirds	45	FLEDGES	
Tree Swallows	786	Mountain Bluebirds	269
Wrens	73	Eastern Bluebirds	1547
Chickadee	1	Unidentified Bluebirds	102
		Tree Swallows	2853
NUMBER OF EGGS		Wrens	193
Mountain Bluebirds	423	Chickadees	10
Eastern Bluebirds	2137	MORTALITY	
Unidentified Bluebirds	171	Bluebirds	277
Tree Swallows	3564	Tree Swallows	418
Wrens	233	Nests with dead Bluebirds	79
Chickadee	10	Nests with dead Swallows	118

Below is the summary of some of the 2014 data collected by Friends of the Bluebirds members and submitted to Data Coordinator, Luc Gamache. This is not a complete set of data as some people have not yet sent in their Summary Reports

Also there is a comparison of data from the last couple of years.

Comparing Data

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2013	2014
Number of lines monitored	61	48	56	50	51	73	41	50
Number of nest Attempts								
Eastern Bluebirds	193	217	361	446	477	514	371	533
Mountain Bluebirds	165	199	222	242	234	242	88	104
Tree Swallows	841	1032	791	935	944	1134	753	786
Number of Fledges								
Eastern Bluebirds	338	523	1040	955	1386	1531	1220	1547
Mountain Bluebirds	446	689	617	661	789	693	323	296

The table above shows a very high increase of nest attempts as well as fledges in Eastern Bluebirds. It also shows an unfortunate decline, not necessarily in the nest attempts but in the number of Mountain Bluebird nestlings that are fledging successfully. Now that the Eastern Bluebird is back from the brink, should we now be focusing in on Mountain Bluebirds? There is one easy thing that we can do at least start with: make your nestbox holes just a little bigger, instead of 1 5/8" make your holes 1 9/16". The Mountain Bluebird is just a little bigger than the Eastern Bluebird, and making the holes just a little bigger allows both species into a nestbox.

Contact List

Below is a list of all of the executive's contact information, as well as my information.

<p>Chairperson: Herb Goulden Email: goulden@mts.net Phone 204-728-8370</p> <p>Treasurer: Joan McTavish Phone: 204-727-8951</p> <p>Secretary: Linda Boys Email: raven@xplornet.com Phone: 204-724-7422</p> <p>Line Manager: Ken Barclay Email: kcbarc@hotmail.com Phone: 204-728-3154</p> <p>Data Coordinator: Luc Gamache Email: lucgamache2@mymts.net Phone: 204-685-2574</p>	<p>Membership Coordinator: Ellen Blain Email: ee.blain@gmail.com Phone: 204-827-2500</p> <p>NABS Liason: Barry and Judy Danard Email: jbdanard@wcgwave.ca Phone: 204-523-8258</p> <p>Webmaster: Rob Shearer Email: shearer.robert@gmail.com Phone: 204-720-9955</p> <p>Newsletter Production: Erica Alex Email: jjalex@mymts.net Phone 204-867-2483</p>
---	--