



# Friends of the Bluebirds

## 2020 Newsletter

### A Letter from the Editor

It is with a heavy heart that I announce my resignation as newsletter editor for the Friends of the Bluebirds. I graduate from high school this year, and will be moving on to Saskatoon where I will study Environmental Biology at the University of Saskatchewan.

I was first introduced to bluebirds when I helped Edith Parsons clean out her nest boxes in the fall of 2013, I was 11. I attended the Friends of the Bluebirds meeting that year, and ended up taking home three boxes. In addition to my own boxes, which I put up on my grandfather's property, I took over part of Edith's line south of Minnedosa, and was hooked on the very first day.

When I arrived on the line to replace the lids in the spring, the birds were there to meet me. Mountain Bluebirds followed along behind me, checking out the boxes as I went, and Eastern Bluebirds flew ahead, leading me down the fence. I never expected to see them so soon. From that moment on I have spent once a week, all summer, out on the bluebird line, doing everything I can to help my feathered friends. I have loved every minute of my time with the bluebirds, and the people who help them.

I wish all the best to the Friends of the Bluebirds, the work you all do is extremely valuable. My final message to you is this: inspire others. Take a friend, old or new, a family member, a student, or a child, and introduce them to the wonderful world of bluebirds. Inspiration is key not only to a happy and healthy organization, but to happy members, and healthy bluebirds for years to come.

Sincerely,

Erica Alex

### COVID-19

Under unprecedented circumstances the FOTB spring meeting scheduled for April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020 has been cancelled due to the threat posed by the COVID-19 virus.

Stay safe and take care during these uncertain times. May the bluebirds bring you hope, and joy.

### Remembering a Friend

This past year, the Friends of the Bluebirds said goodbye to a dear friend.

Luc Gamache passed away in September of 2019, at the age of 77. Luc was a long-time member of the Friends of Bluebirds, and performed the daunting task of compiling the clubs yearly data for many years. He maintained 75 boxes near MacGregor, and was an avid box builder, always experimenting with new designs, and building boxes for other members.

Luc will be dearly missed by the Friends of the Bluebirds. We send our condolences to all his friends and family.

# Banding Bluebirds

By: Raymond Pettinger

I became interested in banding birds after attending “Get to know your birds” at Oak Hammock Marsh in the early 1990s. At the same time they were banding birds caught in mist nets.

I started banding Bluebirds in 1995 after discussing the possibility with a Master Bander, Jim Spear of Russell. I became a sub-bander under his supervision for four years before becoming a Master Bander in my own right. My permit allows me to band only Bluebirds and Tree Swallows.

At this time Barbara and I look after 95 boxes located at St. Lazare, Wattsvie and Shoal Lake. St. Lazare is the best area for Mountain Bluebirds. We seldom see them around Shoal Lake. Out of the 70 boxes at St. Lazare 50 percent have Bluebird young. I band only Bluebirds at St. Lazare and Wattsvie, and Tree Swallows at Shoal Lake.

The number of young varies from year to year. In 2019 I banded 112 Mountain Bluebirds and 17 Tree Swallows while in 2018 I banded 219 Bluebirds and 57 Tree Swallows. At the end of the season, which runs from later April to mid-July, the band numbers attached to the birds are directed to National Wildlife Research, Ottawa along with the species, date banded, age, if adult whether female or male, and the location it was banded.

The best time to band is when the young are 10 to 12 days old. Occasionally we are able to band an adult female. When they are brooding eggs they sit quietly on the nest and are easy to catch.

Most years when checking boxes we see birds with the silver band on their right leg. If it is a female, I may be lucky and capture her if she is sitting on the nest. From the number on the band I can determine if it was banded by me in previous years. On the lining of the band is information telling who to contact should a bird with a band be found. I have found that recaptures are the result of a young bird being banded by me in a previous year, which is usually the case. The birds tend to return to the area where they were raised.



Photos submitted by Raymond Pettinger

## A Comparison of Bluebird Nesting Data for 2013 to 2019 Reported by Friends of the Bluebirds

	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
# OF Lines reported:	46	44	44	40	50	49	41
Number of team Monitors:	32	35	32	28	38	37	32

### Boxes

empty boxes	199	164	176	133	189	201	194
boxes removed	10	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	11
Total # of boxes used:	1326	1413	1291	1267	1372	1394	1334
Total # of boxes:	1525	1577	1498	1389	1561	1595	1539

### Number of nests

Mountain bb	111	102	109	100	199	104	88
Eastern bb	505	502	553	566	446	547	371
Unidentified bb	46	50	39	69	90	47	87
Xnesting bb	0	0	3	1	6	0	0
<b>Bluebird Total</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>736</b>	<b>741</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>546</b>
Tree swallows	836	837	845	776	811	806	753
Wrens	58	45	71	40	57	77	52
Other (chickadee only 2016 & back)	18	1	5	3	1	1	1

### Number of eggs

Mountain bb	452	520	438	380	484	423	402
Eastern bb	2092	2109	2223	2361	2255	2197	1439
Unidentified bb	196	216	140	217	303	179	273
Xnesting bb	0	0	15	5	24	0	0
<b>Bluebird Total</b>	<b>2740</b>	<b>2845</b>	<b>2816</b>	<b>2963</b>	<b>3066</b>	<b>2799</b>	<b>2114</b>
Tree Swallows	4303	4547	4231	3817	3973	3700	2502
Wrens	187	161	201	133	150	249	64
Other (chickadee only 2016 & back)	23	50	15	5	7	NR	NR

### Number of successful nests

Mountain bb	91	93	79	66	66	67	108
Eastern bb	427	376	413	443	403	396	314
Unidentified bb	36	35	24	33	48	27	60
Xnesting bb	0	0	3	1	1	0	0
<b>Bluebird Total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>482</b>
Tree Swallows	674	621	622	576	628	621	404
Wrens	36	23	39	27	19	32	13
Other (chickadee only 2016 & back)	4	2	3	1	1	1	1

### Number of fledges

Mountain bb	414	439	398	313	328	296	323
Eastern bb	1729	1659	1662	1809	1572	1600	1220
Unidentified bb	158	113	98	130	135	107	178
Xnesting bb	0	0	12	2	3	0	0
<b>Bluebird Total</b>	<b>2301</b>	<b>2211</b>	<b>2170</b>	<b>2254</b>	<b>2038</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>1721</b>
Tree Swallows	3417	3547	3400	2933	3141	2977	1803
Wrens	155	118	185	124	107	201	69
Other (chickadee only 2016 & back)	25	9	12	5	7	NR	NR

### Mortality

bb nests with dead birds	28	51	34	40	41	80	43
bb dead young	79	137	85	98	122	282	114
Trsw nest with dead birds	100	97	93	32	44	119	60
Trsw dead young	268	321	360	106	127	423	217

### Nest Success Rate (%) (# successful nests / total # nests)

Bluebirds	83.7	77.1	73.7	73.8	69.9	70.2	88.3
Tree Swallows	80.6	74.2	73.6	74.2	77.4	77.0	53.7

### Egg Success Rate (%) (# fledges/ # eggs)

Bluebirds	84.0	77.7	77.1	76.1	66.5	71.6	81.4
Tree Swallows	79.4	78.0	80.4	76.8	79.1	80.5	72.1

NR = NO REPORTS

# The Importance of FOTB Data

The Manitoba Breeding Bird atlas was a massive science initiative that partnered professionals with hundreds of volunteer bird watchers over five years (2010-2014), in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the abundance, distribution, habitat and conservation of Manitoba's breeding birds. Since its conclusion in 2014, the project has published an incredible online resource featuring detailed accounts of each and every species found to breed in Manitoba. This excellent resource can be found at: [https://www.birdatlas.mb.ca/index\\_en.jsp](https://www.birdatlas.mb.ca/index_en.jsp)

The data collected by the Friends of the Bluebirds is very important, and has been beneficial in determining short term and long term population trends in both Mountain and Eastern Bluebirds, as reflected by the atlas:

## Eastern Bluebird: Trends, Conservation, and Recommendations

Once scarce in Manitoba, the Eastern Bluebird did not become fully established here until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; however, it later began experiencing declines, especially in the 1960s (*The Birds of Manitoba*). These declines led Jack and Norah Lane and the "Brandon Junior Birders" to establish thousands of kilometres of "bluebird trails" with nest boxes placed along fence posts, leading to the creation of the "Friends of the Bluebirds" group in 1959. Long-term BBS data show ups and downs but an overall gradual increase since 1970. The ready use of nest boxes is likely a principal cause of the recent westward spread and increased prevalence in western Manitoba, where the Eastern Bluebird may now out-compete the Mountain Bluebird (which also benefitted from nest boxes). The Eastern Bluebird was formerly outnumbered by the Mountain Bluebird in southwestern Manitoba, except in wooded sandhill areas, but it is now the dominant bluebird there. Despite this increase, threats include pesticide use, winter mortality, and competing cavity users, especially the European Starling (preventable in boxes with a small entrance) and Tree Swallow (reduced by box placement in sets of two)

## Mountain Bluebird: Trends, Conservation, and Recommendations

Historically the Mountain Bluebird extended its range into Manitoba in the 1890s, growing in numbers with the widespread provision of nest boxes from the 1960s onward, though natural cavities are also used (*The Birds of Manitoba*). Within the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mountain Bluebird bred regularly in the southern Interlake and occasionally as far east as [Whitemouth](#), with widely scattered occurrence north almost to the Nunavut land border. Recent contraction of its range has coincided with burgeoning numbers of Eastern Bluebirds in southwestern Manitoba. Data archived by the [Friends of the Bluebirds](#) indicate Eastern Bluebirds starting to increase in the Brandon region the late 1980s, with Mountain Bluebird decline setting in around 2000. Hybridization of the two species is occasionally reported. Declining numbers of Mountain Bluebirds in Manitoba are part of a general trend throughout the eastern third of its breeding range, partly offset by increases elsewhere, especially in the Great Basin and Northern Rockies (BBS). Changing fortunes of the two Manitoba bluebird species are doubtless linked to long-term changes in climate and especially land use. The continued provision of appropriately designed, placed, and maintained nest boxes favours both species, while intensifying agriculture favours neither, and competitive factors between the two species are perhaps too subtle to manage effectively. Forestry management prescriptions for the Mountain Bluebird that are relevant elsewhere (Power and Lombardo 1996) barely apply in its Manitoba range

Taylor, P. 2018. Mountain Bluebird in Artuso, C., A. R. Couturier, K. D. De Smet, R. F. Koes, D. Lepage, J. McCracken, R. D. Mooi, and P. Taylor (eds.). *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Manitoba, 2010-2014*. Bird Studies Canada. Winnipeg, Manitoba <http://www.birdatlas.mb.ca/accounts/speciesaccount.jsp?sp=MOBL&lang=en> [07 Apr 2020]

Swartz, J., and C. Artuso. 2018. Eastern Bluebird in Artuso, C., A. R. Couturier, K. D. De Smet, R. F. Koes, D. Lepage, J. McCracken, R. D. Mooi, and P. Taylor (eds.). *The Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Manitoba, 2010-2014*. Bird Studies Canada. Winnipeg, Manitoba <http://www.birdatlas.mb.ca/accounts/speciesaccount.jsp?sp=EABL&lang=en> [07 Apr 2020]

# Manitoba Nature News



In 2020, Nature Manitoba is celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Due to COVID-19 many of their planned events have had to be postponed or cancelled.

But you can still visit their website at <https://www.naturemanitoba.ca/> and explore a timeline of their long and rich history of enjoying nature.

You will also find fun activities and information to help you through social distancing boredom including Manitoba Butterflies, 100 birds challenge, and nature coloring pages.

## WESTMAN NATURALISTS

The Westman Naturalists will also be providing ideas and activities to stave off the isolation blues, and help you stay connected to nature. You can get connected in a variety of ways:

**Webpage** <https://westman-naturalists.weebly.com/> (join the mailing list under the contact tab)

**Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/Westman-Naturalists-106366634049382/>

**Whats App - Westman Naturalists Group** – for up-to-the-minute updates on Westman nature. You can share your sightings too. You will need a smart phone - to join please click on this link <https://chat.whatsapp.com/GsZuxl8V4Y0DzliKElop>

## Erica Alex

As I have in the past, I will once again be participating in the Great Canadian Birdathon. In addition to birding for a full 24 hours, I will be raising money to support bird conservation in Canada. A portion of the proceeds will go towards supporting conservation and research efforts right here in Manitoba, at the Delta Marsh Bird Observatory.

In the past, my birdathon has consisted of a grand adventure with friends, covering many miles and visiting many communities. However, COVID-19 has made the situation uncertain. So, we have challenged ourselves to a new kind of Birdathon.

This year we will conduct our birdathons separately, from our own homes and backyards. At the end of the day we will come together and compile our counts into one epic list.

My nine acre horse farm, and the cemetery and pothole that are adjacent, has been my favourite birding patch for as long as I can remember. It is an incredibly bird rich area, you never quite know what you'll see next.

I hope you'll consider donating to support bird conservation. You can visit my campaign page at: <https://www.canadahelps.org/me/26TGhu4> or contact me directly at [egalex2002@icloud.com](mailto:egalex2002@icloud.com). Thank You





# Executive Contacts

Visit our website at [www.mbbluebirds.org](http://www.mbbluebirds.org)

<b>Chairperson: Gord Hammell</b> Phone: 204-636-2433	<b>Membership Coordinator: Carole Sangster</b>
<b>Treasurer: Colleen Barclay</b>	<b>NABS Liason: Barry and Judy Danard</b>
<b>Secretary: Linda Boys</b>	<b>Data Coordinator and Webmaster :</b>
<b>Line Manager: Ken Barclay</b>	<b>Linda Pearn</b>

Note: please consider joining the Friends of the Bluebirds executive committee. Many of the current executives have done their part for multiple years. Most positions are not exceptionally laborious, and can be shared between multiple individuals. The club will require a willing executive to continue into the future.