

CANADIAN NESTING BOX REPORT, 1983

Twenty-Second Annual Report from Brandon, Manitoba

The southwest Manitoba nesting box project was carried out again in 1983 by the volunteer group "The Friends of the Bluebirds." Over 60 separate reports were submitted and used in preparing this summary.

A summary of nesting box occupants is shown in Table 1.

Cowbird eggs were found in two nests. Jim Spear noted, "One nest contained a cowbird egg which the [Mountain] bluebird hatched and fed; her own three eggs did not hatch." The other was found with House Sparrow eggs and destroyed with them. Other occupants were four squirrels, one flying squirrel and 29 mice. Mice were found when cleaning the boxes in spring and fall and do not appear to be a problem during the nesting season.

Cross breeding occurred again this year. A female Mountain and a male Eastern Bluebird produced five young and one unhatched egg in box #4900 on the line maintained by Perry and Alice Hopkins near Hartney. The Eastern male was killed by a car, but the female continued feeding the

young and all five fledged. The female raised a second brood with a Mountain Bluebird male.

The Mountain Bluebird suffered a sharp decline in number of nestings in contrast with the other species, which showed increases.

This decline is due presumably to a severe, late spring storm. Records at the Brandon Weather Office show that the temperature declined on 11 May 1983, from the previous day's 20 °C and hovered near zero for six days. Freezing rain, sleet and snow accompanied by winds of 60 to 65 km per hr occurred on 12 May 1983. An accumulation of 5 cm of snow was present by nightfall on 13 May and northwest winds of 40 km per hr were blowing. Snow fell again the next day. By 15 May the sky was clear but the temperature reached -11 °C that night and the minimum temperature did not rise above zero until the 17th.

This storm occurred just as the Mountain Bluebirds were laying eggs. A few lines were monitored just before and/or after the storm and illustrate the

Table 1. Occupancy of Nesting Boxes in Southwest Manitoba, 1983.

Occupant	No. of Nestings
Mountain Bluebird	494*
Eastern Bluebird	87
Bluebird (not identified as to species)	18
Cross-nesting bluebirds	1
Tree Swallow	872
House Wren	84
House Sparrow	127
European Starling	2
Black-capped Chickadee	1

*An additional 107 nests with frozen eggs were reported.

severity of the problem. The area west and north of Brandon was hit hardest with almost total destruction of eggs. Jim Spear found 36 nestings on Shellmouth-Churchbridge line, but after the storm only six produced young. He found many frozen eggs and dead bluebirds and Tree Swallows in the boxes. On several lines all eggs were frozen. In the Fort Ellice area Cliff Findlay examined 41 boxes on 19 May. Of these, 31 had been occupied by bluebirds. He found 58 frozen eggs and one dead female Mountain Bluebird.

When the Mountain Bluebirds began to renest they were in direct competition for boxes with Tree Swallows and had lost the advantage that they usually have in earlier nesting. In the Fort Ellice area, of the 31 boxes that had been occupied by bluebirds 13 were taken over by Tree Swallows. On another line that had had eight Mountain Bluebird nests before the storm, only half were retained by renesting Mountain Bluebirds. Because of this late start on the first successful nesting, there appear to have been fewer completed second nestings as well.

Although the storm was hardest on the Mountain Bluebirds as they were the only ones that had begun to lay, other species probably suffered considerable losses. Three dead Eastern Bluebirds and one dead Tree Swallow were found near Hartney by J.B. Thomas on 15 May 1983. Nine dead Tree Swallows were found packed into a single nesting box after the storm by Grace Terry at Rapid City.

Despite the storm we have an increase in Eastern Bluebird nestings again this year to a value double that of two years ago. Eastern Bluebirds return later than Mountain Bluebirds and the majority of them may have missed the storm. There was also an increase in Tree Swallows and House Wrens.

New boxes have been supplied again by Messrs. Raymond Gladden (500), John Plum (43), Harold Kneeshaw (66), and the Neepawa Boy Scouts (50). The majority of these boxes are now being made with removable bottoms and 1-9/16" entrance holes.

Nesting results were compiled by Ann Smith, Norah Lane, Hazel Patmore, Barbara Robinson, David Barnes and Mamie McCowan.

Fourth Annual Mountain Bluebird Trail Report, Lethbridge, Alberta

Table 2. Occupancy of Nesting Boxes on the Mountain Bluebird Trail, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1983.

Nesting boxes available	1080
Boxes used by bluebirds	185
Bluebird eggs laid	1009
Bluebirds fledged	915
Bluebird nestlings banded	825
Bluebird adults banded	35
Sterile eggs	89
Tree Swallow nests	98*
Tree Swallows fledged	392*
Tree Swallow eggs laid	498*
House Wren nests	4
Number of boxes used	287

*estimated