

Carol Porter Bluebird Trail Results For 2017

The Carol Porter Bluebird Trail consists of 92 boxes located along the Eagle Butte, Ranchville, Jackpot, Thelma and Wildcat Roads. This trail has been continuously monitored since 1989 with only minor changes to the number of boxes and locations of these boxes. These boxes are situated on fence posts along a 55 kilometer reach.

During the period April through August these boxes are visited and serviced weekly (on a three week rotational basis) by a devoted group of volunteers whose efforts result in optimal success in the fledging of young (Fledging is used in this report as the successful rearing of the young from eggs to departure from the box). These volunteers service the boxes affecting any necessary repairs and count and record the eggs and/or young at each box. After the young have fledged they clean out each box readying them for a second nesting or for the following year. In 2017 this dedicated group of volunteers included:

- Peggy and Mike Hansen
- Lorraine and Randy Stotz
- Mel Bender
- Ann and Dennis Hall
- Phyllis and Ross Strobel
- Beth and Ted Turner
- Ric Carrier
- Carol and Brian Lowery
- Dee and Brent Cowan
- Jim and JoAnne MacFarlane
- Donna Steele and Sue Higgins
- Ian and Angela Turner
- Vance Elder and Milt Spitzer

Hearty thanks to these volunteers without whom the rearing success would be much diminished. Also thanks to Ben Velner who keeps us supplied with replacement boxes.

A total of 268 young bluebirds fledged from a total of 336 eggs. Both the number of fledglings and number of eggs laid were down from the past two years but the successfully fledged young are about average for the period of record as were the number of eggs laid. The reduced number of eggs laid is attributable to the much fewer second nestings (7) as compared to the average of about 20. Sterile egg numbers (20) were considerably less than average while abandoned eggs (44) were about average. Abandoned eggs are defined as those eggs that disappeared due to predators as well as those that were simply left in the nest. The weather was great throughout the nesting period and as a result only 6 dead nestlings were found which is considerably below the long term average.

Tree Swallows also use the nest boxes and are in direct competition with the Mountain Bluebirds for the use of the boxes. Fortunately Tree Swallows arrive a little later than the bluebirds and thus the male bluebird will have staked out his box usually repelling all potential rivals. Squabbles still do occur at some box sites and duplicating boxes (on side by side posts) often can reduce the intense rivalry. In 2017 some 324 Tree Swallows were reared in the boxes. Tree Swallows in their own right are desirable species for their insect eating abilities but they are more numerous and are less dependent on man made cavities for successful nesting. Nesting boxes have principally been installed to provide nesting cavities for the bluebirds whose natural cavities have been usurped by alien species such as European Starling and House Sparrow.

While servicing the boxes Sue Higgins and her brother found a young Short-eared Owl in the long grasses near box A-7. While driving Eagle Butte Road there were many reports of Short-eared Owls hunting during the day. Obviously they were hunting to provide for their young. Also on his final trip Melving Bender discovered a small bat in box M-26 likely taking refuge there during the day.

For more details and/or historical records contact Milt Spitzer at (403) 528-3120 or by email at: milton.spitzer@gmail.com.



Photo of Female and Male Mountain Bluebird by Dwayne Myers