



Mountain Bluebird.

Gary W. Sei

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD TRAVELS 130 MILES TO RENEST

Part One

by LORNE SCOTT*

On May 24, 1973, conditions were ideal for catching and banding adult female Mountain Bluebirds, as they were incubating their eggs in nest boxes along my bluebird trails. The females were sitting tight on their nests, as a chilling wind was blowing from the northeast. My approach to most nest boxes was undetected, as the wind rustling in the grass helped to conceal the sound of my footsteps. I had set out that morning at 6:30 and by mid-afternoon had banded my 38th adult female bluebird of the year. Band No. 109-136438 was placed on the leg of a female Mountain Bluebird, which was incubating seven eggs in nestbox No. 1059, two miles east of

Glenavon, Saskatchewan.

A severe wind and rain storm swept through southern Saskatchewan on June 3. Northwest winds from 35 to 70 mph persisted throughout the day, temperatures remained steady around 45°F and over 1¼ inches of rain fell. Winds continued from the northwest at 35 to 45 mph on June 4, temperature climbed to 55°F and another ½ inch of rain fell. Finally on June 5 the wind subsided and skies cleared.

I returned to the Glenavon area on June 11 to band young bluebirds and incubating Tree Swallows. It soon became clear that the storm had raised havoc with the nesting bluebirds: up to 80% of the nests had been deserted along some portions of the trails. Some nests contained full clutches of colored eggs, while others held dead young from 1 to 7 days of age. Many of the successful nests fledged only one to three young. Fortunately, it was still early enough in the season that many bluebirds renested. When I arrived at nestbox No. 1059 a pair of Tree Swallows defended it against my ir

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usion; there was no sign of the Mountain Bluebirds. The Tree Swallows had built their nest over the abandoned bluebird eggs, which were probably deserted during the storm of June 3 and 4.

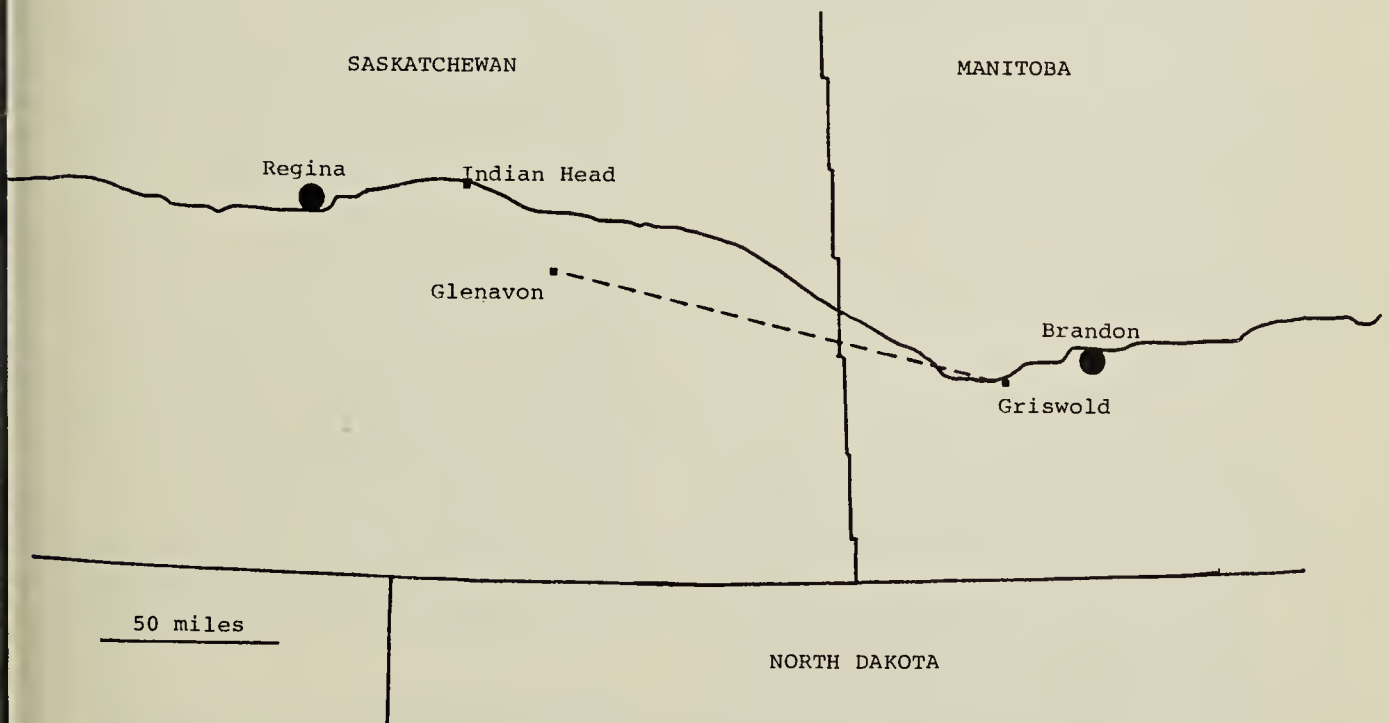
Part Two
by JACK LANE**

The network of nestlines set out by the Brandon Junior Birders over the past 14 years includes a short lateral route beginning about 5 miles south of Griswold, Manitoba, on Highway No. 1 and running east and south for a few miles, finally petering out near Souris. This is the "SAG-PAT" line, established 8 years ago, and now a prolific source of new data on both bluebird species, including two of the few known adult hybrids that have come to light so far. On June 21, 1973, while banding on this line, I caught a female Mountain Bluebird on eggs in nestbox No. 894 and found she already bore a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band, No. 109-136438. Since this band number was a stranger to me, I made a note of it and reported it to the Bird Band Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland. On July 8 I banded on this line again and found four young in nestbox No. 894; I removed one infer-

tile egg. While I made no notes of the fact, I believe the babies were about the awkward stage, or about 1 week old, which meant they hatched July 1. With the young now safely banded I made no further visits to No. 894. In early November I received notice from the U.S. Wildlife Service that band No. 109-136438 had been placed on an adult female Mountain Bluebird on May 24, 1973, by Lorne Scott. The nestbox, No. 1059, was located near Glenavon, Saskatchewan, about 130 miles northwest from the location of our Nestbox No. 894. Letters between Scott and myself have cleared up the loose ends, and we feel the story is worth telling.

It is fascinating to "backtrack" on the Manitoba nesting of this mountain female: if we assume July 1 as a hatching date for four of her five eggs, this means incubation began June 18; the first egg was laid June 14; the grass nest was built June 11-13 (Est.) The great storm of June 3 and 4, 1973, appears to have blown this little bird right out of Saskatchewan, and, we may assume, her mate went with her. If he did not, the female would be faced with the extra necessity of finding another mate. Thus in just over one week at most, she travelled 130 miles, found an empty nestbox, built a grass nest, and started the cycle of a new clutch of eggs, which brings us to June 13 — 10 days after the storm began!

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Map. Locations of first and second nests of bluebird are joined by dashed line.