

# CALGARY AREA BLUEBIRD TRAILS — 1981

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This article gives the results for 1981, the third year in which members of the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society have been carrying on the monitoring of Harold Pinel's Calgary Bluebird Trail. As in the past two years, results are added for Andrew Stiles and Blake Stillings trail. However, older houses are being replaced, and non-productive sections are being modified or dropped. Two monitors added short side loops and one monitor dropped a section that was House Sparrow prone. For interest, a new trail has been added, that of Nancy Murray and Evlyn Annand in the Seebe area.

Table 1 gives an idea of the percentage of Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallow nests with their statistics on eggs and young. In addition, some incidental information is given such as House Sparrow nests, House Wren nests, houses used more than once, boxes vandalized and boxes not used.

In most sections of the trail, bluebirds were down from last year's record year. Although the spring started early with a warm early May, the bluebirds didn't seem to follow through in large numbers. To quote from Ann Machin's summary "On the first visit (24 May) a number of boxes looked as though bluebirds might be starting to nest, but subsequent visits showed no further evidence, or else taken over by Tree Swallows." Ann also reported construction activities in the section of her trail where bluebirds are expected which may have deterred some of them. Other monitors noted places where one or two bluebird eggs were laid but Tree Swallows later took over the nest. There were no instances this year as in the past two where Tree Swallows had

raised bluebird young in cases such as this. Declines in bluebird population were, in some sections, made up for by an increase in Tree Swallow populations, although Tree Swallow total numbers were also down. July was generally a rainy month and this resulted in a much lower percentage of second broods than usual. This is another factor in the lower numbers of bluebirds.

Nancy Murray and her partner Evlyn Annand set up 39 houses along the Trans-Canada highway between Seebe and Canmore. These houses yielded two bluebird nests and two Tree Swallow nests, both near Seebe. Most of the remainder were empty except for one squirrel nest. The reason for the low occupancy may be in part because the birds didn't find the boxes. This usually happens to some extent during the first year of a trail. Another reason may be that the birds don't breed from Exshaw to Canmore where there is little grassland available. We may have the answer next year.

Table 2 lists birds banded on the Calgary to Millarville, Priddis and East Didsbury areas and will form a good population to check for bands when they return next year. No birds banded in previous years were reported.

## Highlights

Perhaps the most interesting happening of the year was reported by Kay Morck. She set up two nest boxes at a friend's acreage near 69th Street and 17th Avenue S.W. One of the nests was occupied by a pair of bluebirds, and the male had a bad leg which dangled uselessly. Kay watched him over the

Table 1. RESULTS OF 1981 MONITORING OF CALGARY AREA BLUEBIRD TRAILS

Trail	Harold Pinel	Blake Stillings*	Andrew Stiles		Nancy Murray Evlyn Annand	Total
			<i>Priddis</i>	<i>Didsbury</i>	Seebe- Canmore	
No. of boxes	213	313	62	116	39	743
Miles of line	111	130	40	65	21	367
Bluebird nests	44	83	42	32	2	203
% Successful nests	89	80e	71	81	50	80e
No. Eggs	219	473	217	170	11	1090
No. Young Fledged	160	329e	139	125	5	758e
Clutch Size	4.98	5.70	5.17	5.31	5.5	5.37
Young/Successful nest	4.10	4.98e	4.63	4.81	5.0	4.68e
Banded			32	14		46
Tree Swallow nests	142	193	27	68	2	432
% Successful nests	80	82e	93	74	100	83e
No. Eggs	748	1070	134	375	9	2336
No. Young Fledged	531	805e	116	296	9	1757e
Clutch Size	5.27	5.54	4.96	5.51	4.5	5.41
Young/Successful nest	4.66	5.06e	4.64	5.29	4.5	4.94e
Banded			1	95		96
House Sparrow nests	17	20	3	19	0	59
Wren nests	1	2	2	4	0	9
Boxes used more than once	17	?	12	10	0	39+
Vandalized	5	8	1	3	2	19
Boxes not used	16	5	5	1	34	61

\*Blake Stillings' count does not include second broods and young fledged are estimated as he was unable to do his last count.

e Numbers estimated

season and noted the difficulty he had getting in and out of the nest to feed the young. She took some excellent photographs of him in a poplar tree, showing the bad leg. Remarkably this pair raised eight young, which is unusually high for bluebirds as five or six is more normal.

Ray Woods reported an instance of vandalism on his trail where someone had pushed a large rock into one of his

boxes. This had spread-eagled the sides apart. When he threw the rock away (quite annoyed, naturally) he noted that a female bluebird was sitting on eggs under the rock with just barely enough room to get in and out. He repaired the box but reported that later predation had prevented this box from being successful.

Darlene Warbanski caught a male

Table 2. BANDING SUMMARY

	Adults	Young	Total
Bluebirds	6	40	46
Tree Swallows	26	68	94

bluebird in the second house she monitored independently east of Didsbury. This is an unusual event as males are not often found in the nest. Darlene found the bird difficult to hold but did note that he had no band. As well, the nest had ten eggs in it! Later monitoring revealed that this box was unsuccessful.

Quite a few nests of first time bluebirds were noted on the East Didsbury section of 116 houses. A count on

the first monitoring on 30 May revealed 11 houses which bluebirds had appeared for the first time, but 12 houses where House Sparrows appeared for the first time. This would indicate that both species can spread. Most of these houses have been in place for two to four years.

Blake Stillings reported three chickadee nests on his trail this year.



*Tree Swallow*

*Jim Sutherland*