

# Welcoming Home The Bluebirds



Since 2018 VARC has been undertaking a Mountain and Western Bluebird nest box monitoring program in Merritt, BC with the help of amazing volunteers from the area. Initially established by citizen science, VARC took over the program when nest box numbers in the project totalled over 400.

This research has given fantastic insight into the behaviours of these beautiful and essential species. The data we collect helps to achieve three main objectives;

- To establish long-term monitoring and research providing invaluable data for regional conservation initiatives and international migration monitoring efforts;
- To initiate community outreach by involving citizen science individuals and groups as well as schools, ultimately providing conservation education by way of monitoring boxes;
- To colour band bluebird (Mountain Bluebird and Western Bluebird) nestlings using nest boxes to document dispersal, site fidelity and population dynamics.

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Mountain Bluebird populations have declined. They benefited from the spread of logging and grazing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when these practices created open habitats for foraging. The waning of these industries, coupled with the deliberate suppression of wildfires, led to a dwindling of open acreage in the West and the species' decline.



Western Bluebird

Recently, as land-use practices have stabilized, so have Mountain Bluebird populations. However, populations are still declining in areas where trees are too small to provide natural nesting cavities. Forest and agricultural management practices have also reduced the availability of suitable nest sites. Bluebirds are among the list of birds that nest in cavities but can't excavate them independently. Competition is high for nest sites. House Sparrows, European Starlings and House Wrens also compete fiercely with bluebirds for nest cavities. The construction of nest boxes in suitable habitats can provide a population boost.



Western Bluebirds



Mountain Bluebird



Mountain Bluebirds

This project would not be possible without the help of our incredible volunteers and supporters. This season, 22 people will be checking in on boxes, three people will be making new boxes, and an additional three landowners would like nest boxes on their land.

Because of this incredible support from the Merritt community, we will have approximately 425 boxes available for the bluebirds!

This means we are increasing the number of nest boxes we are monitoring, adding new boxes to existing areas and introducing a few new locations. Many of these additions will "pair" boxes, decreasing competition between bluebirds and swallows.

We hope the returning Bluebirds will feel welcomed and that there will be a high nest success rate for all.

**To learn more about  
the project, or to get  
involved, please**

**[CLICK HERE!](#)**

