

# 2021 Report

2021 report to VWF by Rob H.

Rube Johnston Bluebird Trail 2021 – season results

## Spring Setup:

The weather had warmed substantially, melting the snow, so on March 18 through 20, 2021, I prepared the bluebird trail nest boxes for the season. I did the boxes north and west of town on March 18, the boxes south of town on March 19 and the boxes east of town on March 20.

Compared to last year and other years there was not much snow remaining along the roads and in the ditches.

Surprisingly, I saw no male Mountain Bluebirds. There are usually a few by this time. It could be the weather further south in North America is slowing down the bird migration.

I did see one Red-tailed hawk on March 19 being harassed by a resident Raven. On March 20, I found that Bald eagles had returned to a nest east of Vegreville. Otherwise, I only saw a few European starlings and Canada Geese on that weekend.

Spring Nest Box preparation includes fastening the box bottom in place, tightening all mounting and top screws and making any repairs needed. On Akasu Hill I was surprised to find the box that I thought was missing. Unfortunately it had been torn off the post, leaving only the back plate attached, so will need fixing.

Now all we need is those bluebirds and swallows to find their way back to the nest boxes.

## Fall Routine:

Fledged birds: Mountain Bluebirds 16 in two boxes, Tree Swallows 309 in 62 boxes

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Nest boxes disturbed by other species: House Wren 6, House Sparrow 0, Mouse Nests 10

I normally perform the season end checks in the third week of August to avoid finding mice nesting in the boxes. This year, due to an unavoidable delay, I checked on the boxes on September 7, 8 and 9, 2021.

Consequently, I found mouse nests in ten boxes. They promptly evicted. Mice never interfere with the nesting birds as they move in only after the birds have nested and flown south.

Mountain Bluebirds utilized just two nest boxes this year, but fortunately those pairs double clutched, giving 8 fledged per box for a total of 16. I did find one non-viable egg in one box. In general Mountain Bluebird numbers have been declining. For example, in 2016 there were eight Mountain Bluebird boxes, with 44 fledged young.

Tree Swallows nested in 62 boxes out of a total of 66. One box was empty and one box on Akasu Hill was (once again) destroyed by vandals. The extreme heat of this summer caused 12 nestlings to perish in three boxes, but overall the Tree Swallows fared well with 309 fledged. The physical orientation of the boxes (N, E, S, W) had some bearing on fledgling mortality due to hot weather.

Roeben test boxes (horizontal design): SR3, R10 and R19 all had Tree Swallow nests. The photos provided show the nest results. SR3, at the VWF shooting range and facing southeast, had a typical tree Swallow look to it with some feathers, and no sign of House Wren or mice. Box R10, at the back of the Buck for Wildlife property and facing west, had all the feathers pushed to the back of the box. Box R19, when inspected, had a substantial number of spruce twigs deposited by a House Wren after the Tree Swallow nesting. Tucked in behind the twigs were a lot of dried mushrooms. I have never seen mushrooms in nest boxes before. I suppose a mouse could have stored them in the box.

Maintenance:

As I worked along the trail, I re-marked all of the box identifiers and tightened fence post screws. On a few of the boxes the top back seal has

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broken or is missing. To compensate, I've screwed down the lid at the back and left corner. Three boxes had to be moved to better posts, due to rotting of the previous posts. One nest box front facing was damaged by grass mowing equipment. I pruned away wolf willow and poplar growth that was crowding two boxes.