



Mountain Bluebird: Teasing but beautiful

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

Ahhh, May. May is a peak month for birding in Washington.

We've watched the snow melt away, the roads dry, and the temperatures warm.

May is a great time to get out and explore the openness of north central Washington.

Numerous bird species are arriving during their spring migration, so many, in fact, that we may need to prioritize the birds we want to see. So many species, so little time.

For me, May triggers trips to wonderful, local destinations to see birds. One of my favorite routes is to drive north on Rock Island Grade, leaving Highway 28 near Rock Island Dam, and then across the plateau and down Titchenal Canyon to Waverille.



Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.



We can see several bird species on this route but, for me, the star of the route is the Mountain Bluebird.

I was lucky to see a few Mountain Bluebirds prior to moving to the Wenatchee area. I learned to recognize the brilliant blue of the males and learned a bit about their behavior and flight

patterns.

The number of my sightings each year has gone way up now that I live in north central Washington and get to see plentiful bluebirds for an extended period of time.

Bluebird populations are fairly stable now after a decline in numbers between 1966 and 2015.

Bluebirds prefer to forage in open areas as they look for insects. Our shrub-steppe zones offer a great supply of bugs to eat but very little in terms of suitable nesting habitat.

Recognizing that, many people or organizations have stepped up to the challenge and provide artificial nest boxes. Many miles of roads in our area have bluebird nest boxes that were placed by someone or some organization.

Maybe you have a bluebird box on your property or nearby. If so,

you can delight in seeing them pair up, build a nest in your box and fly in and out to gather food for their young.

If you don't have a nest nearby, look for them along our rural roads.

I encourage each of you to grab your binoculars, pack a lunch and your camera and then head out to see this beautiful, seasonal bird.

They'll tease you by flying away as you get close to them. Don't worry, they won't go far and you'll get another chance.

You can stop at a distance from a nest and watch the birds come and go.

Be respectful — stay at a distance and be still as you watch. It's a great way to teach kids (and adults) about the birds and the need to respect them during the critical nesting season.

Good luck.